DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 289 CE 082 768

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TITLE School Students' Learning from Their Paid and Unpaid Work.
INSTITUTION National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-1-74096-004-1
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 156p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia (Cat no. 706; $38.50 Australian). Tel: 08 8333 8400; Fax: 08 8331 9211; e-mail: vet_req@ncver.edu.au; Web site: http://www.ncver.edu.au. For full text: http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr9031.pdf.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Career Education; Career Exploration; Case Studies; Developed Nations; Education Work Relationship; Experiential Learning; Foreign Countries; *High School Students; High Schools; Job Placement; Job Skills; *Part Time Employment; Questionnaires; Skill Development; Student Attitudes; *Student Employment; Work Experience; *Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS Australia (New South Wales); Australia (South Australia)

ABSTRACT

A project carried out in New South Wales and South Australia examined ways in which Year 10, 11, and 12 students experience workplaces. A questionnaire administered to students in 13 schools received 1,451 responses. Case studies in five schools included interviews and focus groups with students and teachers. Interviews and focus groups with employers in both states were carried out. Findings indicated about 60 percent of students had formal part-time work; about two-thirds had done work experience, and about 11 percent had undertaken vocational placements; paid work was highly concentrated in retail or fast food; work experience was widely distributed across a range of industry areas; and the major reason for part-time work was for extra spending money. The three major forms of workplace activity had different purposes. Work experience was seen as a process of career sampling and familiarization with work habits. Vocational placements were seen as sites for developing specific skills. Paid work was a way of earning money, although significant learning occurred. Skills best developed in all three forms of workplace activity were verbal communication, how to behave at work, and using initiative. The most common specific skills mentioned by students were also common to all three forms of workplace activity: dealing with customers, communication skills, and operating a computer. (Appendixes include 127 references, instruments, school case studies, and employer reports.) (YLB)

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ISBN 1 74096 004 1 print edition
ISBN 1 74096 005 X web edition
ID/TNC 68.01

Published by NCVER
ABN 87 007 967 311

252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, SA 5068
PO Box 115, Kensington Park, SA 5068, Australia
www.ncver.edu.au

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Acknowledgements

Many people assisted in the successful completion of this project.

The research team, from University of South Australia and Charles Sturt University, comprised:

Project manager	Erica Smith
New South Wales project manager	Annette Green
Research team members	Sue Erickson, Ros Brennan, Steve Keirl
Quantitative data entry	Lou Wilson, Judy Geeves, Fiona Underwood
Quantitative data analysis	Lou Wilson
Clerical support	Miriam McLean, Judy Geeves, Helen Sheridan

The reference group comprised:

Keryn Bainbridge	Woolworths, South Australia
Marianne Millan	New South Wales Board of Studies
Lyn Robinson	Australian Council for Education Research
Robin Ryan	Flinders University
Nerolie Whitbread	Year 11 student, Coolamon, New South Wales
Paul Willis	Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia

The following people made valuable contributions at different stages of the project: Rod Francis, Michele Simons, Betty Leask and Kelly Slee.

Erica Smith would like to acknowledge the support of the South Australian Wholesale Retail and Personal Services (WRAPS) Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB), her current employers, for allowing her the time and flexibility to complete the project.

We would also like to thank:

- the schools which allowed us to administer the questionnaire or carry out focus groups (we recognise the extra burden this imposed upon their already busy schedules)
- the hundreds of Year 10, 11 and 12 students who willingly completed questionnaires, and also those involved in early informal and formal piloting of the questionnaire
- the employers who gave up their time to attend focus groups or be interviewed individually; their willingness to participate indicated the commitment of employers to aiding young people's transition from school to work
- the key stakeholders (listed in appendix 1) who helped set us on the right path at the beginning of the project, and most of whom participated in the validation process at the end of the project
- the additional people involved in the validation process at the end of the project:
  - Stephen Crump
  - Bruce Norton
  - Edward Slack
  - Colin Shearing
  - Bob Smith
- Jennifer Gibb at the National Centre for Vocational Education Training (NCVER) for her support, and the anonymous reviewer for his or her constructive comments on the interim and final reports
- many other people within the two universities, in State education departments and in the general community who assisted us in many ways, and, through their interest in the findings, provided motivation to complete the project

Executive summary

Introduction

This project set out to examine the different ways in which young people still at school experience workplaces. The research, carried out in two States—New South Wales and South Australia—during late 2000, contained both qualitative and quantitative components.

There is currently intense policy interest, in Australia as in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, on school-to-work transitions. Allied to this there has been rapid expansion of vocational education and training (VET) courses in schools since the mid 1990s. Before this time, the major way in which school students experienced workplaces was through work experience programs. In addition, many children start part-time work whilst still at school, although this phenomena has been little examined in Australian literature. The project therefore set out to examine participation in, and learning from, three forms of workplace engagement: work experience, paid work, and vocational placements (or 'structured work placements') forming part of VET courses.

Research questions

The three primary research questions were as follows:

1 What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

2 What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

3 Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

In addition, the foundations for answering a fourth question were laid. This question was:

4 What effects do such experiences of the workplace have on later access to employment and higher education?

The study secured a database of 413 students who indicated willingness to be involved in a follow-up study that will examine the employment and further education experiences of these students in the light of their workplace engagement whilst at school.

Research method

A full literature review, mainly of Australian literature but including some works from the United States and United Kingdom, was carried out. The review covered literature on senior secondary students' work placements and work experience as well as issues associated with part-time work. The most relevant literature regarding employees' learning in workplaces was also briefly examined. Interviews were carried out with 16 key stakeholders in Australia, with a particular focus on the two States in the study—New South Wales and South Australia—enabling a picture to be built up of current policies and practices on schoolchildren and workplaces.

The quantitative phase of the study involved administration of a questionnaire to Year 10, 11 and 12 students in 13 schools in New South Wales and South Australia. The questionnaire included personal details, a record of participation in a number of paid and

unpaid activities in workplaces, and detailed sections about learning in work experience, paid work and vocational placements. 1451 responses were received to this questionnaire. In the qualitative phase, case studies were carried out in five schools, including interviews and focus groups with students and teachers involved in various ways with students and workplaces. In addition, a special focus group of Year 12 students was convened. Also, interviews and focus groups with employers in both States were carried out. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and were then drawn together to form some overall conclusions.

Findings of the study

What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

The survey found that around 60 per cent of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 had had formal part-time work (50.1% when family businesses were excluded). Around two-thirds had done work experience and around 11 per cent had undertaken vocational placements. Analysis of Year 11 and 12 figures showed that participation in work experience for those students was 87 per cent, and in vocational placements was almost 18 per cent. Of those in the study, 14.6 per cent had not had any experience in workplaces at all. Participation rates were found to be higher in government than non-government schools, and, because non-government students were over-represented in the study—owing to better response rates from Catholic and Independent schools—these figures may not be fully representative of Australian schoolchildren. Paid work was highly concentrated in certain industry areas—two-thirds worked in retail or fast food—while work experience was widely distributed across a range of industry areas.

Because there had been very few large-scale studies of students' part-time work, a number of general questions about part-time working were included in the survey. Findings included:

- the major reason for seeking work was for extra spending money, although around ten per cent needed the money to help support themselves or their families. Around 20 per cent sought work mainly to get experience
- student jobs differed from the general workforce in two major respects: they were more likely to be casual, and they were concentrated in two industries (fast food and retail)
- students worked on average 8.5 hours a week and generally found little difficulty in fitting in their school work around their jobs
- there were many reasons why some students did not engage in paid work; these were both positive (for example wanting to focus on study or sport) and negative (for example unable to find a job in the local area)

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

Both the survey and the qualitative research confirmed that the three major forms of workplace activity had different purposes:

- Work experience was viewed as a process of career sampling and of familiarisation with work habits. Even those with paid jobs and/or vocational placements still found work experience useful. However, some employers were not sure how to handle work experience students and seemed to prefer vocational placement students.
- Vocational placements were clearly seen as sites for developing specific skills. For this reason, employers found them easier to manage.
- Paid work was primarily undertaken as a way of earning money; nevertheless significant learning occurred. Much paid work was undertaken alongside other teenage workers rather than with adults.

Employers reported they gave paid workers more training than work experience or vocational placement students, although they did not regard themselves as responsible for paid workers' learning in the same way. Similarly, student workers reported feeling better trained and more secure in the workplace. Responses to questions about learning, both generic and specific skills, indicated that students learned more from paid work than from other forms of workplace activity (although vocational placements came a very close second). This was partly because paid jobs lasted longer than work experience or placements, but there were other reasons as well. The best learning results came from school-based apprentices and trainees, although only a small number (28) were captured in the study.

The skills which were best developed in all three forms of workplace activity were:

- verbal communication
- how to behave at work
- using your initiative

Written communication was the least well developed of the generic skills. The most common specific skills mentioned by students were also common to all three forms of workplace activity, and were:

- dealing with customers
- communication skills
- operating a computer

Learning methods were also similar in all three forms of activity: being shown by a supervisor or fellow workers were the most common forms of learning. Paid workers also commonly learned by watching and were less likely than work experience or placement students to ask questions (perhaps because they were afraid to appear inadequate). Employers reported that those students who were most motivated received more training and learned most.

There was not much linkage between school and workplaces, except in the case of vocational placement students. Only 30 per cent of paid student workers ever discussed their jobs in class. A small percentage of students (13%) were counting their paid jobs towards their school qualifications. Of those who were not, only a small minority (17%) wanted their jobs to count; although a third said they might like to consider the idea. Some groups of students such as the 'less academic', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) and those from a non-English-speaking background (NESB) were more likely than others to want their learning from paid work to count.

Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

The following findings emerged from the survey and the case studies:

- rural students had more involvement in workplaces than urban students
- girls had more involvement in workplaces than boys
- NESB students were less likely to have had paid jobs for an employer than the average
- ATSI students and those with physical disabilities relied more upon work experience and vocational placements than upon paid work for their workplace activities
- ATSI students were likely to rely mainly upon schools to help them access workplaces
- NESB students, like ATSI students, did not have much help from family and friends in accessing workplaces but were likely to rely on their own resources rather than utilising school help

It should be noted, however, that the NESB group was particularly diverse and NESB students were by no means all disadvantaged. Employers and education department policy officers discussed particular groups of NESB students (such as Muslim girls) who had problems accessing workplaces, and special programs were in place for them, as well as for ATSI students. The results for ATSI students, although marked, may not be

representative, as few ATSI students responded to the survey. Study of ATSI participation would need to be more targeted. The case studies and employer interviews suggested that, for both ATSI and NESB students, lack of confidence and a desire to stick to industries where there was a tradition of participation of the particular group might affect participation.

Implications of the findings for policy and practice

The study showed very clearly that part-time work is now a normal part of life for the majority of students in Years 10, 11 and 12. While some groups of students are less likely to access paid work than others, the differences in labour force participation among equity groups are less than might have been expected. Work experience remains an almost universal experience, at least by the end of Year 11, and vocational placements are increasing in importance. However, experiencing workplaces through vocational placements is still relatively uncommon (involving less than a sixth of Year 11 and 12 students in the sample surveyed) and is not likely to become as common as either paid work or work experience.

Thus, while State education departments, teachers and specially formed bodies such as the Enterprise and Career Foundation (ECEF) have been working hard to increase students' participation in workplaces through vocational placements, students have been mounting their own assault on workplaces through paid work, as well as continuing their involvement in work experience. The emphasis on vocational placements, as a part of VET-in-Schools programs, has perhaps diverted attention and resources away from ways of improving students' experiences in paid work and in work experience.

In the scramble to find and administer vocational placements, less attention has been paid to the issue of learning in placements, except insofar as such learning can be turned into VET qualifications. A similar process of 'capturing in qualifications' is currently being envisaged for part-time work. The evidence, however, suggests that school students do not have an interest in having their part-time work 'colonised' by the education system. Yet, on the other hand, the study suggests that the learning outcomes of part-time work may be greater than those of other means of experiencing workplaces. However, paid employment for student workers is available only in a limited range of industries. The most common form of experiencing workplaces—work experience—has been virtually ignored in recent debates, yet the study has shown that there is clearly room for improvement of learning outcomes in work experience.

The study therefore raises some questions, which need further investigation:

- How can learning from part-time work be captured and utilised in a way which is both attractive to students and practicable for employers?
- How can student workers be encouraged to begin their careers as lifelong learners through seeing their paid work as a learning opportunity?
- How can the lessons which have been learned from vocational placements be transferred to work experience to make the latter a more satisfying experience for all students and employers?
- How can those 'pockets' of students who face challenges in accessing workplaces continue to be assisted to ensure they are not disadvantaged as more of the 'mainstream' student population expands its involvement in workplaces?

1 Introduction

A number of factors have led to a change in the way in which young Australians first experience work. These include the numbers of young people staying on at school until Year 12 (although the percentage is now falling slightly, it is still far higher than 20 years ago), the demand for cheap unskilled labour in fast food, retail and recreational outlets, and the desire of young people to earn an independent income. Such trends have been well observed in the North American context for several decades but are comparatively new to Australia.

Many Australian young people now undertake a considerable amount of paid work whilst still at school, often spanning a range of jobs and with varying degrees of responsibility, including supervisory roles. Comparatively few young people now enter their first full-time job without considerable working experience, although entry-level training programs (apprenticeships and traineeships) are still based, to some extent, on the premise that young people enter these programs without prior experience.

At the same time as the growth in teenage part-time employment has been occurring, schools have continued with their well-established work experience programs. These programs were initially introduced to give the school student a taste of the workplace before leaving school and to sample a career area of interest. Over the past five years, schools have also become heavily involved in vocational education and training (VET) courses, generally in Years 11 and 12 but sometimes earlier. These courses lead to a recognised VET qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Most of these programs involve some sort of work placement (Ainley & Fleming 1995). Such placements[1] involve the achievement of specific competencies whilst in the workplace. In addition, some young people start and even complete formal employment-based entry-level training programs through undertaking part-time apprenticeships and traineeships while still at school. Sometimes these programs are associated with school, and sometimes they are entered into independently.

Vocational education in schools has grown as a response to policy initiatives in Australia, in common with other western countries, aimed at improving school-to-work transitions[2] as well as increasing skill levels in the economy. The inclusion of workplaces as sites of learning in school students' education is believed to aid both of these aims; yet most of the available literature relating to work experience and vocational placements consist of scoping studies and discussion of organisational issues rather than examination of what school students actually learn or the outcomes of such programs.

While the growth in part-time student employment is well known, there has been little in-depth research on the patterns of employment of such students and how they experience their work. Much published research tends to focus on the way in which this work can affect time spent in study and post-school education enrolment (for example, Ashenden 1990; Robinson 1999) rather than, in detailed fashion, the learning which can be gained from paid work. A few recent works have looked at the learning arising from part-time work and how this might be incorporated into the curriculum (VETNETWORKER 2000; Billett 1998; Hull 1997; DETAFE 1993; Hill & Woolmer 1987), but there is only a small body of literature, and the numbers of respondents in the published

[1] Various terms are used to describe placements associated with accredited vocational education courses in schools. In this report, the term 'vocational placement' is used.

[2] There has been a common belief that the full-time youth labour market has collapsed, although this belief has been challenged recently by several authors, including OECD (1998), Marks and Fleming (1999) and Smith (2000). However, full-time entry-level jobs have certainly disappeared in several industries and the belief has been a spur to vocational education in schools initiatives.

research are small. However, there is a considerable amount of policy interest in this area (for example MCEETYA 2000). There was need, therefore, for a larger project which systematically investigates the degree of formal and informal training associated with students' part-time work, as well as the way in which schools might acknowledge and build on students' learning.

The major research gap addressed in the current study was the lack of any large-scale research into the overall learning experiences of young people in workplaces. Each young person may experience workplaces in a number of ways, but before this study there had been no attempt to examine, holistically, young people's workplace experiences and the associated learning which the young person undergoes. The extent of learning experienced by young people in each type of workplace activity and the similarities and differences between the learning from work experience, work placements and paid work are all matters of interest which are covered by the study.

The four research questions, which were devised for the current study in order to address this research gap, are as follows:

1 What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10 and Year 12 school students experience the workplace?

2 What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

3 Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

4 What effects do such experiences of the workplace have on later access to employment and higher education?

The study attempted to provide answers to these four questions[1] using the following research methods:

- consultations with key stakeholders
- literature review
- survey in 13 schools in New South Wales and South Australia
- case studies in five schools and a Year 12 focus group in New South Wales and South Australia
- employer interviews in New South Wales and South Australia
- validation of findings by stakeholders

While the data collection was confined to New South Wales and South Australia for budgetary reasons, the study was expected to have national relevance and significance.

This report outlines the findings from each stage of the research process and draws some conclusions from the findings. The conclusions have clear policy implications, and it is to be hoped that the data will support national and State/Territory policy-makers as they devise and refine policies and programs relating to school students and workplaces.

[1] It should be noted that the fourth and final research question, relating to the effects which students' workplace activities have on later access to further education and full-time employment, was not designed to be answered in any depth by this study. The aim was to establish a database of students who were willing to take part in a later study. In addition, the question was discussed where appropriate in interviews and focus groups.

2 Literature review

This chapter examines current literature on school students' experiences of workplaces through part-time work, work experience and vocational placements (often referred to as 'structured work placements' or simply 'work placements'). Several of the stakeholders consulted in the early stages of the project pointed out that students may experience workplaces in several other ways (such as accompanying parents to work), but such experiences are outside the scope of this project and therefore this literature review. The literature covered in this chapter is mainly Australian, but some overseas literature is referred to in areas where the Australian literature is not extensive.

In this chapter, the literature on school students' part-time work is examined first, followed by that on work experience and vocational placements. Next, a short discussion on learning at work is presented. Finally, a small body of literature that weighs and compares school students' learning from the different modes of experiencing the workplace is described.

School students' part-time work

In the United States, mass teenage student employment has been a feature of the labour market for a long period of time, partly because of high school retention rates (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor 1998). In the United Kingdom, it has been argued that although it is likely that school-children from lower socio-economic backgrounds have always needed to work (Mizen 1995), a feature of post-war labour markets has been that middle-class children have entered the labour market (Griffin 1985). In Australia, large-scale participation of school students in the formal labour market has been a more recent phenomenon. The recent growth in student working may be related to a number of factors, including increased school retention rates through to the mid 1990s and the increased prominence of service industries in the Australian economy reliant upon casual low-cost employees.

Extent of part-time student working

Ashenden (1990) provides the most comprehensive coverage of Australian student-working, including some qualitative data, but his findings are now a little old. However, he does provide a useful summary of existing literature from the human resource management as well as education disciplines. More recently, data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) on 17-year-old school students indicates that in 1992 between one-quarter and one-third worked during the school year (Robinson 1999). Robinson (1999) indicates that in 1992 the average Australian 17-year-old part-time worker worked for nine hours a week during the school year. This is consistent with other Australian studies (Labour Market Analysis Branch 1993; Brown, forthcoming). During the 1990s, the participation rate of school students is likely to have increased. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data[4] indicates that in August 1997, amongst teenage students, 28.8 per cent of teenage boys and 38.1 per cent of teenage girls (33.6% of all teenage students) were working part-time (Wooden 1998). These two sets of statistics, however, are not directly comparable[5], and the ABS data captures only formal work.

[4] ABS, The Labour Force, 6203.0

[5] The data are not directly comparable as the ABS statistics include teenage university students as well as school students.

Two recent Australian studies, each confined to one State, provide information about patterns of student-working. Brown (forthcoming) studied 1156 students at three schools in Victoria. The main focus of her study was on the role of part-time work in adolescent development. She found that 51 per cent of these students (who were in Years 10, 11 and 12) had some form of paid part-time work over the six-month period of the study. Female students had higher participation rates than males, and the average number of hours worked was 8.9 per week, increasing to 17.8 hours per week during school holidays. Like Robinson (1999), Brown (forthcoming) found that the industry areas involved were mainly retail and service industries. The Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE 2000) used a statistical sample of all government schools in South Australia, receiving 2244 responses from Year 10, 11 and 12 students. This study found that 47.3 per cent of these students were employed, with a further 19.1 per cent (whom they described as 'unemployed') looking for work. Year 12 students showed the highest participation rate, and more rural than urban students were employed. Forty per cent of students worked ten hours or more a week in their main jobs.

Nature of student part-time working

Typically, student workers begin at an early age with what is generally perceived as more informal work—delivery of newspapers[6] and (in the United Kingdom) milk for boys, and babysitting for girls. As they get older, they move into more formal work, generally in the service sector (Wilson 1989; Hobbs & McKechnie 1997). Part-time student workers are employed in a narrow range of industries, mainly fast food and retail (Robinson 1999; Brown, forthcoming).

Most studies of student workers have indicated that students work primarily to earn extra money and to gain independence (DETE 2000; Robinson 1999; Ashenden 1990); and they also wish to gain experience which may be useful in future full-time employment. It is generally agreed that most teenage workers do not contribute to the basic family income (Greenberger 1988; Labour Market Analysis Branch 1993), although, of course, their financial independence removes pressure from parents to provide money for discretionary spending. There is little evidence that students are looking for long-term employment in the industry in which they had part-time work.

Part-time working may have a beneficial influence on subsequent employment rates. The LSAY study (Robinson 1999), tracked the 17-year-olds in 1992 until the age of 19 and found that those who had been student workers were significantly less likely to experience unemployment after leaving school.[7] This was also a finding of Hawke et al. (1998) in their study of teenage employment in fast-food outlets and supermarkets. Greenberger (1988) found in the United States that not only did student-working decrease the chances of unemployment but it was also linked to higher wages in the first few years of full-time work. Robinson showed that this was true only for Australian students who had worked in Year 12 for more than ten hours a week, and the effect was very small. Working part-time while at school may also have some influence on the type of full-time work gained after school; ex-student workers were more likely than those who had not worked in school to go into sales and personal service work.[8]

Part-time work for school students has several important effects on young people, including the 'shading-in' of work to their lives (Greenberger 1998) so that the transition from school to work is no longer as abrupt as it might have been in the past. However, Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) are dubious about claims that part-time work aids the development of maturity. They suggest that those young people who gain relative financial independence and social maturity through part-time work are not necessarily psychologically mature. In fact, excessive work may encroach on the time needed by adolescents for exploration and maturation, described by Erikson (1968) as 'moratorium'

[6] Hobbs and McKechnie (1997) point out that while newspaper delivery is seen as 'pocket-money work', it is in fact an integral part of the multi-million dollar media industry

[7] The direction of causation is, of course, unclear. It could be that certain teenagers are more likely to secure employment, whether full time or part time.

[8] Again the direction of causation is unproven.

activities. They suggest that part-time work promotes neither autonomy nor social responsibility and that student workers are 'adultoid'—mimicking adult behaviour without possessing underlying understandings (Greenberger & Steinberg 1986, p.174). An Australian study of young full-time workers, who had almost all previously worked part-time, confirmed that young people do not see their part-time jobs as 'real jobs', asserting that their real transition to the workforce begins upon leaving school (Smith 2001, p.14).

Negative experiences of part-time student workers

Working long hours has been found to affect school grades (Greenberger 1988; Robinson 1999), to lead to stress (Mortimer & Johnson 1998) and to loss of sleep (Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor 1998). The Australian study (Robinson 1999) found small negative effects on Year 12 results when comparing outcomes for senior students who did not work with those who worked for more than nine hours per week, while the United States studies found that 20 hours per week was the critical amount of time spent at work. Teachers, however, are consistently more likely to stress the disadvantages of part-time work than are students themselves or their parents (Hull 1999). A quantitative United States study by Hotchkiss (1986) found no significant adverse effects of working part time. However, neither did it find any significant benefits in terms of indicators such as socialisation to work. Greenberger (1988) characterises most student-worker jobs as routine, tedious, badly paid, and with poor working conditions. She suggests that the satisfaction gained from part-time work is mainly social, since most teenagers work with other teenagers. Ashenden (1990) suggests that the surprisingly high level of satisfaction reported by student workers must be because they expect so little from their jobs in the first place.

Safety and health issues have been a major concern of several studies into student workers. The Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor (1998) in the United States and Hobbs and McKechnie (1997) in the United Kingdom both report high levels of teenage injuries at work. While health and safety issues amongst student workers has not been the subject of any major Australian studies, there have been press reports of injuries amongst young teenage workers, and Smith (2000) reports on young people being left in charge of workplaces alone early in the morning and late at night. The Committee on the Health and Safety Implications of Child Labor (1998) argues that inexperience itself is a factor in industry accidents. Also, the committee suggests that young workers are often assigned to jobs for which they are untrained and that because of their inexperience they are less likely than older workers to complain or to ask for training. Moreover, adolescents are more likely to take risks than adults in all spheres of activity (Santrock 1990).

Learning and training in part-time student working

While most commentators (for example Greenberger 1988; Hobbs & McKechnie 1999) believe that part-time work carried out by school children is boring and menial, there is a little contrasting evidence (for example Hill & Woolmer 1987). Walker (1988), in a study of young Sydney males, reported part-time work with significant degrees of responsibility. This was borne out in another recent study (Smith 2000). Greenberger (1988) reports that some part-time workers gain experience of supervising other staff. Mortimer and Johnson (1998) suggest that some general, transferable skills obtained through part-time employment can be transferred to full-time employment. These include work skills such as handling money and relating to customers and supervisors; skills which may be of use at school such as working with computers; time management skills and personal attributes such as increased self-awareness and self-efficacy. Part-time work also offers the chance to sample careers and perhaps dismiss those which are found to be unrewarding (Hull 1999). However, Munro (1992), in a study in the United States, suggests that the learning potential of part-time work is limited, maintaining that part-time work does little to facilitate development of knowledge because it tends to be service-oriented and therefore develops the affective domain rather than the cognitive.

The level of formal training provided to student workers is generally reported to be low. Although many employers of teenagers, such as McDonalds, pride themselves on their training programs (Tomkins 1995), the actual experiences of young people tends to

contradict the public statements of such employers. As Greenberger (1988, p.151) comments, 'the workplace is not a hotbed of learning'. Greenberger (1988) found that only those teenagers in the less common student-worker jobs, such as clerical and labouring work, were likely to receive significant training periods. Hawke et al. (1998), in a study of youth employment (not just student-working) in fast food outlets and supermarkets, found that young people and casual staff received less training than older workers or permanent staff. Hull (1999), however, in a small-scale study in Western Australia, found what she believed to be a different picture, with most students reporting at least some training, although this appears to have been primarily induction training.

Work experience

Traditional 'work experience' is a common feature for Australian children during Years 10 or 11 of school. Generally, students attend a workplace of their choice for one week's experience of working life. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was considerable debate about the purpose of work placements for schoolchildren. For instance, are they for students to learn *about* the workplace, or to learn *in* the workplace? (Sweet 1994, p.16; Smith 1994, p.150). In the early 1990s, a shift began towards utilising the workplace as a site for developing skills. One of the earliest and best known examples of skills-based placements was Training for Retail and Commerce (TRAC) (Smith 1994; Scharashkin 1994). The principles involved in TRAC have now been incorporated in most VET-in-Schools programs. Currently, there is a fairly clear distinction between skills-based structured placements (see next section) and the traditional work experience programs. Structured workplace learning is usually regarded as being more effective than work experience (Cumming & Carbines 1997) but, obviously, presents more challenges (for example skills must be formally assessed).

Normally, work experience programs are seen as an opportunity to learn workplace habits, to investigate how workplaces operate, and sometimes to learn about a specific occupational area which may be a career possibility for the young person. Watts (1991b) lists a number of aims of work experience: enhancing, motivational, maturational, investigative, expansive, sampling, preparatory, anticipatory, placing and custodial. Not all of these aims are made explicit, as Watts points out.

Programs are generally supported by documentation for the employer and for the young person. The latter documentation normally covers legal matters and, also, some guidance relating to expected learning. For example, a student handbook (Brighton Secondary School, South Australia 2000) asks students to note the technical skills learned and also their achievement with relation to the Mayer key competencies (AEC/MOVEET 1993). Interestingly, this same handbook acknowledges that students may have part-time jobs but does not refer to them as sites where students may have developed some of the skills expected to be learned in work experience. It refers to them only as possible impediments to the student being available for full business hours at his or her work experience site.

Vocational placements

As already noted, vocational placements are becoming more common, and these are normally in association with formal VET courses in the post-compulsory years of schooling (Years 11,12, and sometimes 13). The growth in this area has been rapid, as documented by several authors such as Ainley and Fleming (1995 1997) and Malley, Ainley and Robinson (2001), and will be discussed more fully in chapter 3. VET for school students is an area of rapid growth and (sometimes confusing) diversity (Tattam 1998). Most VET-in-Schools courses offer work placements. However, courses may involve other forms of connection with industry and the world of work such as projects, industry visits and guest speakers, the development of school enterprises, and so on (Evans & Poole 1992). Not all States have a formal requirement for work placements as part of school VET programs. Only New South Wales and Western Australia have a formal requirement. The other States and Territories require placements only when the

appropriate Training Package[9] or curriculum document deem placements mandatory (MCEETYA 2000). Vocational placement programs are required by MCEETYA to be based on competency standards and relate to AQF qualifications (Miles Morgan Australia 1998, p.5). Since most industries have now developed Training Packages, these are increasingly forming the basis for VET-in-Schools programs and, thus, for the skills to be developed in placements.

Much of the literature about vocational placements consists of 'mapping exercises' designed to capture the extent and diversity of programs involving vocational placements. Nevertheless the picture remains far from clear (MCEETYA 2000). There are great variations in the structure and length of placements across the States and Territories (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 1997; Teese, Davies & Ryan 1997). Moreover, confusion is caused by different terms such as vocational education, VET-in-Schools, work placements, school–industry programs, and, most recently, enterprise and career education. Thus, information has to be examined carefully to ensure like is compared with like. Much of the literature refers to VET-in-Schools programs in general, and sometimes separate data are not available for work placements as a component of these programs. An example of such a study is Velde and Cooper (2000) where the students' opinions of placements are not separated from those of their VET course in general. There are only a comparatively small number of research-based studies on work placements. These include Teese, Davies and Ryan (1997) and Misko (1998a), the latter examining both work experience and vocational placements.

Major issues raised in the literature about work experience and work placements

Because vocational placements have been available for such a short time, most of the literature about schoolchildren spending time in workplaces relates to work experience. The major issues may be similar for work experience or work placements, but there may be some dangers in assuming this. However, in this section the literature on the two types of workplace experiences has been considered together.

The role of employers

There has been relatively little scrutiny of the employer's part in work placements. Employers are under no obligation to take part in work placements. Many authors report that it is expensive and time-consuming for employers to take part in the arrangement of work placements and in supervision and assessment of students (Watts 1991a, p.140). Thus a view exists that extra obligations associated with work placements, such as an increased role in assessment (Miles Morgan Australia 1998, p.24), may result in employers withdrawing their co-operation. However, there is some evidence to show that employers may actually react favourably to increased obligations associated with more structured work placements (Smith 1994; Sweet 1995, p.16; Smith & Smith 1996).

There are concerns that the availability of work placements could become a growing problem (Misko 1998b). Shilling (1989) pointed out the fragility of placement arrangements, the danger that a single unsatisfactory student may lose a long-established placement, and the destructive dynamic by which falling numbers of employers places untenable pressure upon the remaining pool. Employers may drop out of placement programs because they find that work placement students take up too much time and energy to supervise; even when an organisation agrees to take students, individual staff may resist (Keating & Zbar 1994). Figgis (1998b) reports that non-management staff often have to be talked into agreeing to have a placement student. A major study carried out for the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) (Miles Morgan Australia 1998) examined the potential for increasing placement opportunities, identifying a number of problem areas, including:

- cultural differences between school and workplace environments

[9] Since 1997, Training Packages have been, or are being, developed for each industry area. These consist of competency standards 'packaged' into qualifications, with assessment guidelines and, sometimes, support materials to assist in delivery.

- proper preparation of students for workplaces
- good communication and co-ordination mechanisms

For this reason a co-ordinated regional approach is often adopted to arranging placements; these avoid multiple approaches to employers by different schools and provide a mediating body between the school and the employer. An example of such a body in Tamworth, New South Wales, is discussed in *Training Agenda* 2000 (p.42).

It is generally accepted that many employers participate in work placements from a sense of social responsibility (Helms & Nelson 1997; Misko 1998b; Bailey, Hughes & Barr 1998; Figgis 1998a). Generally, host employers are likely to have better human resource and training programs overall than employers who do not take work placement students (Smith & Smith 1996; Bailey, Hughes & Barr 1998). Vo (1996) suggests educational institutions should focus on employers with a high proportion of entry-level positions (that is, apprentices and trainees). Employers do benefit from placements, however; they gain the benefit of an 'extra pair of hands' (Smith 1994; Figgis 1998a) and sometimes report an opportunity for their staff to learn supervisory and training skills (Figgis 1998a). They may also see work placements as an opportunity to screen potential employees (Smith 1994; Figgis 1998a).

Resourcing and legislative issues

Proper administration and monitoring of work placements is very expensive and time-consuming, and relies very much on the energy and enthusiasm of individual co-ordinators (Keating & Zbar 1994; Sweet 1995). The importance of individual teachers' or co-ordinators' expertise seems greater than in many other educational roles, perhaps because of the range of skills and knowledge required. Placement co-ordinators obviously need to be highly skilled in dealing with communication issues between parties to placements as well as having detailed knowledge of local industries and commerce. Ryan (1997) suggested several years ago that staff development was likely to be one of the major costs of VET-in-Schools. Keating and Zbar (1994) identified in the mid 1990s a lack of preparation of teachers for arranging and managing work placements. There is still no standard Australia-wide qualification or staff development program in Australia for VET-in-Schools teachers in general or, specifically, in relation to placement issues. However, ECEF (formerly ASTF) provides a range of support services for placement co-ordinators, including network arrangements, training for co-ordinators and an electronic discussion list.

While school systems and regional organisations have to invest a great deal of time and money on arranging placements, students and their parents may also have to make an investment. Accessibility to placements is sometimes a problem for students because of isolation or poor public transport (Keating & Zbar 1994). In rural areas, some students have to spend considerable time and money on travel to get to their placements (Basic Work Skills Training Division 1995).

The large-scale presence of school students in workplaces has had legal implications. Concerns include occupational health and safety and workers compensation issues which have needed to be addressed by the different States and Territories (John Ray & Associates 1994). In addition, the involvement of school students in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships has required alteration of industrial regulations.

Normative literature on work experience and work placements

A wide variety of literature has been published which aims to improve practice in work placements and work experience. This ranges from generic 'advice' to locally produced materials for particular programs. An example of the former is a complete edition of the United Kingdom journal *Education + Training*, devoted to practical matters relating to work experience (Hopkins 1990). Australian examples include a New South Wales leaflet produced in 1993 (Lepani & Currie 1993), a workplace supervisor's handbook produced by the Centre for Workplace Learning (Centre for Workplace Learning 1995) and, more recently, a publication aimed at practitioners produced by the National Centre for

Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in their series *Getting to grips with ...* (Misko 2000). The latter includes administrative arrangements, how to monitor and evaluate placements, and an annotated bibliography. The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) provides a number of publications for schools administering work placements, including 'quick tips' leaflets on specific topics such as inducting workplace supervisors and winning parents' support. These guides are available on-line at <www.ecef.com.au>.

It is generally agreed that close and frequent communication between teacher and employer will assist employers to fulfil their roles (Helms & Nelson 1997). More support from schools for students is also recommended. A single mentor is often recommended for students, and training for mentors is often advocated, but they often show little interest in attending training that is provided (Basic Work Skills Training Division 1995). There need to be clear expectations of all parties to the placement and mutual respect between school and employer.

Both students and employers seem to prefer longer placements to shorter placements (Teese, Davies & Ryan 1997; Keating & Zbar 1994). However, time for placements always competes with other demands in the curriculum. A Victorian study in small and medium businesses found that a day a week was the preferred structure rather than block release (Helms & Nelson 1997). However, some employers may prefer shorter placements or block placements, depending on the nature of the industry and the commitment employers are prepared to make to placements. Challenges in structuring successful placements are so great that Poczik (1995) in the United States suggests that work placements need the intervention of governmental agencies and a publicity campaign aimed at employers, unions and parents to make them effective. However, Australian practice has been for successful placements to grow from relationships between schools and employers, facilitated by resources made available through bodies such as ECEF.

Critical literature

Much literature on work experience and, especially, on vocational placements and the associated VET-in-Schools courses tends to be enthusiastic, almost evangelical, in tone (for example Frost 2000). This perhaps reflects the fact that school VET programs, in particular, are generally made successful by energetic and hardworking teachers who convey their enthusiasm to researchers. The 'enthusiastic' literature also tends to reflect dissatisfaction with the traditional 'academic' school curriculum (for example Laidlaw 2000). A relatively small number of authors (for example Petherbridge 1997) have taken a critical approach to work experience and work placements; these normally examine placements from the students' point of view. While most students report positive experiences in their placements (Misko 1998a), they also face many challenges. Students may be potentially at risk from employers who may exploit them or behave inappropriately (Shilling 1989). He points out that students are removed from their normal support systems and cannot develop new supports in the workplace in the limited time they are there (Shilling 1989, p.164). A poor work experience placement has the potential to damage self-esteem and attitude to work (Smith & Smith 1996). Students may experience pressure to conform to workplace mores even if they are inappropriate. For example, Wellington (1992) gives an example of a girl reporting 'girlie' pictures on the wall at work; she had felt uncomfortable but was too timid to complain. Alternatively, companies may flout the safety rules that the student has learned at school. Shilling noted (1989) that students complained about such instances only when they believed they had not learned anything valuable from their work experience—in other words, when the employer was not fulfilling his or her side of the bargain.

Although students may have bad experiences in the workplace or may encounter questionable practices, they are rarely prepared for these. Just as there is a dearth of critical literature, a critical approach to work and workplaces does not seem to be encouraged in placements themselves. 'Enquiry-based programs' (Cole 1987), where students undertake activities such as research in workplaces as part of school assignments, are more likely to develop in students the facility for critical examination of workplace practices.

There is some evidence that not all students have equal access to work experience and placements. Smith and Keating (1997) suggest that some students have better access to workplace activities than others because of their own or family contacts, or perhaps because they are more acceptable to employers. Aboriginal students typically tend to be placed in Aboriginal organisations (ATSIPTAC 1998), although it is unclear whether this is from preference or necessity. Rural students have access to a limited number and quality of placements, although rural employers may be more supportive of work experience and vocational placement programs (Smith & Smith 1996). Shilling (1989, p.171) maintains that tasks allocated to students on work experience may be strongly gender-differentiated.

Finally, there is some debate about how VET programs can be properly evaluated when the purposes are unclear. While research and anecdotal evidence may show that students enjoy placements, that there are positive 'side-effects' and even that they may contribute to increased student retention to Year 12, these are not generally articulated as the purpose of placements. As Athanasou (1996, p.8) puts it: 'The challenge is to develop school-industry programs with intentional consequences rather than positive experiential by-products or as a remedy for the ills of secondary schooling'.

Learning and assessment in work experience and work placements

A limited amount of research has been carried out into the actual learning undergone by students in workplaces. Figgis (1998b, p.25) found that employers were 'not particularly insightful' into learning issues. Although such a comment is a little patronising, it does point to a real problem when researching placements: employers are often too busy to discuss learning issues in detail or simply not very interested. A United States study found that students undertook mainly routine tasks but that learning varied widely between worksites (Stasz & Kaganoff 1997). Students are generally understood to learn work habits (Stasz & Kaganoff 1997), but not all commentators agree that work habits such as conformity and acceptance of poor working conditions are necessarily a good thing. White (1989, pp.9–10), for example, questions the 'behavioural' skills supposed to be developed, suggesting that submissiveness and related 'social-psychological characteristics' have been redefined as 'essential components of industrial or vocational skill'. However, it is generally accepted that students appreciate the 'realness' of work placements and the opportunity to apply theory (Grosse 1993, in Ryan 1997, p.11).

However, specific expectations of the educational purpose of placements are rarely made clear. It is still unclear whether students are expected to 'learn *about* the workplace or *in* the workplace? (Sweet 1994, p.16). With the advent of competency-based training and particularly Training Packages, students' learning in workplaces is meant to be clearly tied to competency standards; that is, to be solely skills-based. However, studies repeatedly mention learning workplace mores, learning about the 'real world' and so on (learning *about* the workplace rather than *in* the workplace) as being valuable outcomes of placements. There are clearly tensions between such desired and actual outcomes, on the one hand, and assessment methods that are based purely on competency standards, on the other hand. The issue has also been identified in the university sector (Benett 1989).

A recent survey of over 2000 school students found that the most frequently reported skills learned were working with others, industry-specific skills, communication, and computer operation (Misko 1998a). Stern et al. (1990) advocate long-term follow-up research into students who have undertaken vocational education programs, which would give a more rounded picture of student learning. A recent study by Misko (2001) is one of the few Australian examples of such a research project. Misko (2001) reports on the destinations of school leavers who had taken part in work placements funded by ECEF (formerly ASTF).

Students' learning appears to depend greatly upon the calibre of the workers supervising or working closely with them. Students may copy bad working practices, and the short length of the placement means that students are unlikely to be able to make judgments about the standard of what he or she is being taught. Petherbridge (1997, p.23) found that few students could be classed as 'exploratory' learners, who 'brought independent judgment to bear upon their learning' and looked outside their own 'job' to the organisation as a whole and were able to critique aspects of its operations.

Traditionally, employers have been asked to complete brief reports on work experience students, often covering indicators such as punctuality, 'attitude' and so on. More formal assessment in workplaces was introduced as part of TRAC (Smith 1994) and, subsequently, in VET-in-Schools programs. The use of Training Packages as a basis for placements may lead to increased assessment-related stresses as they introduce the requirement to assess against competency standards. For example, such assessment requires more effort on the part of the employer; and requires the student to remain compliant to the employer in order not to jeopardise his or her qualification. Assessment in the workplace against competency standards as part of the requirements of a course requires that the workplace has all relevant equipment, which may not always be the case (Basic Work Skills Training Division 1995). Assessment of generic skills has been shown to present special challenges (Queensland Department of Education 1997) .

General literature on learning in the workplace

Any discussion of school students' learning in workplaces needs to be set in the context of how workers in general learn in workplaces. In applying this literature to the current project it needs to be pointed out that there are extra layers of complexity. These relate to three major points:

- First, while part-time student workers are part of the normal workforce, work experience and vocational placement students are not. As Smith and Harris (2001) point out, literature on work experience and placement students explains that such people are not in an employment relationship, and, therefore, it cannot be assumed that they either work or learn in the same way as employed people.
- Second, literature on workplace learning generally assumes that workers are adults, but there is some evidence (for example, Wilkinson 1989; Sigelman & Shaffer 1995) that adolescents learn differently from adults. There are certainly some psychological features of adolescents that make settling into work and learning at work more difficult than for adults; these include egocentrism (Elkind 1967; Selman 1980) and rebelliousness (Odlum 1957).
- Third, a recent study of teenagers starting full-time work (Smith 2000) suggests that when entering the world of work, young people have a variety of things to learn—'domains of learning'—some of which are additional to things which adults need to learn when staring a new job. It is likely that young people entering work experience and vocational placements, as well as part-time student workers, need to learn across this wide range of domains of learning, too.

Literature on learning in workplaces is found in two major discipline areas—management and education. Training literature from the management discipline (for example, Smith 1998; Tovey 1997; Camp, Blanchard & Huszczo 1986) examines the structures and methods which organisations set up to facilitate training of their workers. Structures might include the establishment of training departments with dedicated training staff (Kenney & Reid 1995) and the implementation of accredited training programs using national competency standards into organisations (for example Smith & Smith 1998). Training methods include off-the-job face-to-face training, the utilisation of self-paced learning materials such as videos or computer programs, and on-the-job coaching by supervisors or peers. Induction programs for new workers are utilised by a large proportion of workplaces (Kenney & Reid 1995), providing housekeeping information and aiding organisational socialisation.

Literature on workplace learning from the education discipline focusses on learning as experienced by workers. It is often noted that informal methods of learning are often as important and effective as formal methods of learning in workplaces (Marsick & Watkins 1990). Various authors debate the effectiveness of on-the-job learning versus off-the-job learning. It is generally agreed that on-the-job learning is more successful in aiding transfer of learning (Smith 1998; Cox 1997) and is more authentic (Billett 1994). However, learning on the job may be a hit and miss affair (Casey 1993) and may restrict wider understanding and the ability to question practice (Brennan & Smith 1996). Other workers may teach bad practice as well as good (Harris et al. 1998). It is often noted that workplaces tend to put production before training, so that training tends to suffer when production pressures are great or where mistakes by trainees might be costly, in terms, for example, of materials wasted (Evans 1993).

Perhaps the most directly relevant recent work from the workplace learning literature is the study by Smith of teenage full-time workers new to the full-time workforce (Smith 2000). This study found that the young people's major methods of learning in their workplaces were:

- being trained in formal situations
- asking questions (stealing knowledge—Brown & Duguid 1996)
- having a go—not being 'pushed aside' (informal, experiential learning—Kolb 1984)
- learning from mistakes (behaviourism—Skinner 1968; incidental learning—Marsick & Watkins 1990)
- being shown how to do tasks while an explanation was given (cognitive apprenticeship—Collins, Brown & Newman 1989)
- carrying out simple tasks (situated learning, legitimate peripheral practice—Lave & Wenger 1991; progressive skilling in apprenticeship—Lane 1996)
- watching and copying other workers (social learning—Bandura 1977)
- copying a role model (behaviour modelling—Goldstein & Sorcher 1974)

(Smith 2000, p.348)

While these learning methods apply to young full-time workers, it is likely that they would also have some application to student workers and students on work experience and vocational placements.

Weighing and comparing the learning experiences of work placement, work experience and paid part-time work

There is very little literature comparing the different ways in which school students experience workplaces. Smith (1996) talked to TRAC students about what they learned from their placements and found that some considered they learned more from their placements than work experience. 'It's more focused and advanced than work experience' was one comment (Smith 1996, p.18). Recently, there has been some interest in learning that students do in part-time work. A study by Symmonds et al. (1999) compared learning in different contexts, including part-time work, but this related to technical and further education (TAFE), not school, students. There has been some policy interest (MCEETYA 2000) in the area of accrediting skills-based learning from students' part-time jobs. However, the MCEETYA report states that while there is 'a degree of interest by some stakeholders in further pursuing the issue', there is 'very little enthusiasm on the part of most student part-time workers in having their competencies formally recognised' (MCEETYA 2000).

A pilot project in Western Australia (Jones & Associates 1999) examined ways of recognising skills from paid employment, unpaid work, voluntary work and other out-of-school activities. Twenty-six students volunteered to have their skills assessed. Recognition was granted against competency standards and the key competencies. The students in the project were not undertaking VET-in-Schools programs, and it is not quite clear for what purpose the recognition was being carried out. Nevertheless the study provides an interesting picture of the range of workplace experiences, both formal and informal, of school students. Another pilot program, in South Australia (VETNETWORKER 2000), utilised school students' part-time work to gain certificate I in retail operations. This program included top-up training as well as recognition of prior learning.

Two authors have made favourable comparisons of paid work with work experience and work placements. Schloss (2000) has recently suggested that paid work is more authentic than work placements, maintaining that placements are essentially 'pretend' situations. Her assertions, while interesting, are not backed up by empirical evidence. Billett (1998) provides a sounder theoretical basis for the argument for using part-time work as a basis for learning activities at school. He suggests that part-time work could well be used as a substitute for work experience, which he sees basically as finding out about work, but not for structured placements which are skills-based. Billett advocates lessons where students reflect on and compare different part-time working experiences. Such links are reported

on by Stern et al. (1997) in relation to co-operative education programs in the United States. Such programs create explicit links between school and work and appear to create closer links between student workers and their employers, also. The authors found that the negative effects of part-time working (such as lower grades) were less for 'co-op' students than for other student workers. However, Stern et al. (1997) were hesitant about drawing firm conclusions from their findings, as they noted that particular types of students were likely to be enrolled in 'co-op' programs—typically female low-achievers, and not black and Hispanic students.

Perhaps the closest research to the present study is a United States study carried out in 1988 (Stone et al. 1990). The study, in two school clusters, compared students' experiences in paid work and 'school-supervised work'. The latter included school enterprises as well as work experience programs. The study found that school-supervised work generally involved 'higher quality jobs' where more skills were utilised and learned, and also involved more contact with adults than paid work. The authors, however, advise caution in interpreting these results; for example, they suggest that only certain types of students may be enrolled in school-supervised work programs (Stone et al. 1990, p.49).

Summary

The literature review has revealed the following major points that have implications for the study.

There is very little literature about student workers in Australia; the data from the LSAY study are now quite old, and the recent study by Brown was confined to metropolitan schools in Victoria. The need was clearly established, therefore, for a scoping study to establish the extent and nature of part-time work for school students.

There is a large body of literature, both Australian and overseas, on work experience and work placements, but much of it falls either into the 'scoping' category or the 'enthusiastic' category. There has been relatively little empirical investigation of what school students actually learn during these workplace experiences.

There is some concern over equity of access to part-time work and to equity issues associated with work experience and placements, but there is little empirical research in this area.

Several writers allude to *the superiority of placements compared with traditional work experience,* but more exploration of the differences is needed.

There is still some confusion over the outcomes intended from both work experience and structured work placements.

There is growing interest in capturing the learning from part-time working, although such evidence as there is suggests that policy-makers are more interested in this than students themselves.

3 Current policy and practice

Introduction

This chapter looks at current national and State policies and practices relating to students' time spent in workplaces. Students' experience of the workplace may include privately arranged part-time work, work experience of varying lengths and configurations, and vocational placements which are a mandatory component in most of those Year 11 and 12 courses which attract a VET qualification, as well as a school qualification. An interest in students' workplace experiences is a feature of both government and non-government school sectors.

The chapter provides an overview of the national picture in early 2001 relating to school students and workplaces. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of policies and practices in New South Wales and South Australia, the two States in which the study took place. Finally, some issues of concern raised by policy-makers and other stakeholders are outlined. The information presented in this chapter was gathered from interviews with key stakeholders and policy-makers, and from policy documents.

Overview of school students and workplaces in Australia

The growth of VET-in-Schools

As already discussed in chapters 1 and 2, a major feature of the 1990s has been the growth of VET-in-Schools programs. 'VET-in-Schools' is defined by MCEETYA (2000, p.82) as 'programs (which) relate to, or provide, VET certificates within the AQF and the Senior Secondary Certificate'. The Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has established a VET-in-Schools Taskforce, which reports to and advises the Ministerial Council. This framework provides eight key recommended elements[1] for VET-in-Schools programs:

- explicit and well-articulated pathways
- community partnerships
- lifelong learning skills and attributes
- enterprise and innovation
- career information and guidance, and access to student services
- individual assistance for students at risk
- supportive institutional and funding arrangements
- monitoring and evaluation

(MCEETYA 2000)

The taskforce aims to provide a nationally consistent policy framework for VET-in-Schools. However, a major point made by most stakeholders was that, irrespective of policy arrangements, there are huge variations in partnership arrangements, funding, staffing, placement opportunities and student demand. Variations in practice reflect the attitudes of the school, parents and community towards vocational programs. The

[1] Further work is taking place on these elements.

continuum of practice goes from those schools in which VET-in-Schools courses are made a priority, through to schools where 'vocational education is marginalised ... because of its association with "instrumental" learning and students not proficient in academic subjects' (Malley et al. 2001, p.23).

VET-in-Schools activities have been encouraged by many factors, including:

- increased school retention rates during the late 1980s and early 1990s resulting in a perceived pool of students who were not interested in traditional 'academic' curriculum and might be more attracted to curriculum linked more closely to work
- students remaining at school in order to receive the Common Youth Allowance[11]
- a wish to ease school-to-work transitions by providing school students with some employment-related skills before entering the full-time workforces
- a wish to increase the skills base of the economy
- an unexpected demand for available VET-in-Schools opportunities from students themselves

State initiatives, while encouraged by policy and funding, are still struggling at times with practical implementation issues. The private school sector is generally perceived to be slower in its take-up. However, there is considerable debate over whether a vocationally oriented curriculum should replace a more general curriculum in schools.

The growth of popularity of workplace learning experiences and opportunities while at school has been far greater than was anticipated. There were 136 710 students involved in VET-in-Schools programs in Australia in 1999 (MCEETYA 2000). This is a rapid increase from 60 000 in 1996. In 1999, 34 per cent of secondary students in Years 11 and 12 were enrolled in VET-in-Schools courses within the senior secondary certificate (MCEETYA 2000, p.74). The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF),[12] a federally funded body which co-ordinates vocational placements for students, provided support for VET-in-Schools programs that included 52 000 students in 1999, and they estimate that there were 167 000 VET-in-Schools students in 2000. VET-in-Schools programs for Year 11 and 12 students are now offered in most industry areas and include offerings from the AQF Level 1 to AQF Level 3[13]—although what is offered at a particular school or cluster of schools varies greatly according to resourcing, location and enrolments.

Most courses offered in VET-in-Schools are based on the relevant industry Training Package.[14] In some States, the competencies are embedded within general education courses developed by boards of studies, while in others the units of competence are included in stand-alone VET courses which have been developed and endorsed by boards of studies as part of the senior secondary certificate. Registration arrangements vary in different places. The school may be registered as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) or may deliver programs in partnership with a TAFE or other RTO. Achievements in some VET subjects are included in the calculation of a student's Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER). A number of academically orientated students have selected from these courses, particularly in Information Technology (IT) and Hospitality, both for career reasons and to help get part-time work while at university.

Work experience

The term 'work experience' is used in this report to refer to the 'work taster' experiences arranged by schools—most commonly in Year 10—generally lasting for a week. There is an increasing call for work experience and other work-related activities to be available in earlier school years to accommodate the needs of students who find the general education

[11] These provisions for receipt of this allowance are that students above school-leaving age must be involved in study or further training.
[12] Now known as the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, (ECEF), with the Federal Government broadening its scope to 'not only embrace vocational education and training, but (to) cover other subjects, including academic subjects, which help to prepare young persons for their post-school career', (Van Beek, posting to VECO, 13 Feb 2001).
[13] The number of courses offered at AQF level 3 in schools is limited.
[14] Training Packages, which are gradually being introduced for all industry areas, comprise industry competency standards packaged together into qualifications at different AQF levels.

curriculum too theoretical and appreciate a more practical, or action-learning, approach. However, some stakeholders believe that the value of work experience is lessened by its failure to offer structured learning programs such as those associated with VET-in-Schools courses. The latter are perceived to be more legitimate, rigorous and controlled, particularly in terms of assessment. As the volume of the latter increases with further student participation in senior VET courses, there is a fear among stakeholders that the pool of host employers might be swamped by demands. This might make the offering of other forms of vocational learning more difficult to arrange in the middle school years, except for special programs for 'at risk' students.

Vocational placements

The term 'vocational placements' is used in this report to refer to the more formal arrangements in Years 11 and 12 that are undertaken as part of VET-in-Schools courses. In policy documents, they are generally referred to as 'structured work placements'. Nationally, the number of students involved in vocational placements has doubled from 25 780 in 1997 to 57 343 in 1999 (MCEETYA 2000).

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

Australia wide, about 1500 school students were involved in school-based part-time apprenticeships and traineeships in 1998. In 1999, this had risen to 3994. The anticipated number in 2000 was more than 7000 (MCEETYA 2000). Apprentices and trainees are paid according to an award or agreement for time spent in the workplace and for time in formal training. The trainee spends 1500 to 1600 hours in combined formal training and work. In many cases, industrial awards have needed to be modified to allow for part-time workers to undertake apprenticeships and traineeships, and in New South Wales, for example, apprenticeships have not been available to school students. Full-time apprenticeships generally last for three or four years, while traineeships last only for one. So, school-based apprentices would not normally complete their course whilst at school, although school-based trainees may. In addition to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, some school students enter such contracts of training independently of school.

Other paid work

There are no general restrictions on school students working part time relating either to minimum ages or the hours they are permitted to work. However, if they are still in the years of compulsory schooling, they may not work during school hours without permission from the education authority.[15] Each industrial award has criteria relating to young people and work, but neither State nor Federal Departments of Industrial Relations have regulations concerning young people and work generally.[16]

Chapter 2 has indicated that data on student part-time working is thin. There has only been a limited number of studies, and regular employment surveys do not elicit useful data. However, most stakeholders were highly aware that part-time work could provide useful experience for young people and there was a consensus that this was an area in which education policy had a legitimate interest. Recommendation 13 of the MCEETYA (2000) report relates to potential for recognising competencies gained in school students' part-time work in VET-in-Schools courses.[17] Nationally consistent procedures for this process are sill being discussed. In New South Wales, students' part-time work may already be used to satisfy the mandatory vocational placement of courses within industry curriculum frameworks.

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[15] In New South Wales, the legal age for leaving school and starting full-time work is 14 years and 9 months. In South Australia, a school student under 14 needs a letter of permission from DETE to work during school hours.

[16] Information sought from Industrial Relations, New South Wales and South Australia, and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in Canberra.

[17] This is despite the fact that one of its findings was that students may not want their learning from part time work recognised at school as it is seen as a separate activity not connected to schooling.

School students and workplaces in New South Wales

The New South Wales Government implemented a succession of policy initiatives during the 1990s, including the *Directions* policy statement of 1993, *Focus on youth* (1998) and the *Ready for work plan* (1999). The intention has been to offer a broad curriculum designed to offer suitable courses for the full range of students, with a particular emphasis on encouraging students to stay on until the end of Year 12.

The White Paper *Securing their future* enunciates a series of principles guiding VET-in-Schools.

Government schools

Work experience

Work experience is usually offered in Year 10 but is sometimes arranged in earlier years or in Year 11 for some at-risk students or those with special needs. In most cases, students locate sites for work experience. The career education teacher assists those who have not been successful in finding places. Work experience is implemented as part of a careers education program within a school or as part of the school certificate course, Work Education. This course is intended to introduce students to some of the elements of work and is accompanied by study materials that focus on perceptions and practices of work. Preparation for work experience and follow-up teaching and learning after the experience varies widely in individual schools.

VET-in-Schools

In 2000, as part of the reform of the Higher School Certificate (HSC), seven Industry Curriculum Frameworks were introduced in New South Wales, each containing a number of accredited HSC courses.[28] These are 'dual accredited' courses, which means that as well as being part of the HSC, students may attain an AQF VET credential, typically at Certificate II level. Courses include, Business Services (Administration), Information Technology, Tourism and Hospitality, Construction, Metals and Engineering, Primary Industries and Retail.[29] These courses are taught by school-based secondary teachers who have undergone professional development and industry placements to take on these roles, including attaining a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. Vocational placements, which are mandatory for these courses, are organised either directly by the school or TAFE college by a district work placement co-ordinator or through local partnerships with industry. Students who select a VET-in-Schools course spend 35 or 70 hours in vocational placements per course, depending on the level of study.[30] In some of these courses, there is an optional written HSC two-hour examination that students may nominate to undertake in Year 12 if they wish to include the VET course in their University Admissions Index (UAI)[31] score. Only one VET course may be selected as part of the UAI result.

VET courses may also be delivered by a TAFE college or other RTO to school students. These include the frameworks courses mentioned above, and courses in other industry areas developed by TAFE and endorsed by the Board of Studies as part of the HSC. These TAFE-delivered endorsed courses do not count towards the UAI. Typically, the training is 'off the job' and work placements are not part of these courses. Industry areas available in 2001 include automotive, child studies, community services, hairdressing, design and music. In some cases, a VET course developed by a school or other RTO in an industry area not covered by a framework may be endorsed as part of the HSC. These do not count towards the UAI.

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[28] The Industry Curriculum Frameworks have been developed by the New South Wales Board of Studies in consultation with industry (ITABS) and teachers, and are based on the relevant training packages.
[29] Most schools are not able to offer the full range of these subjects, although some very innovative clustering arrangements have been put in place to allow maximum choice.
[30] 35 hours for a 120-hour course and 70 hours for a 240-hour course.
[31] Also referred to as a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER)

Other

Enterprise Education across all years of schooling includes non-accredited programs designed to increase students' entrepreneurial skills through simulated business environments, simulated economies within micro societies, profit-making student-run businesses and volunteering, both school based and with external agencies. These courses are generally not accredited.

School-based part-time trainees combine their HSC VET course (or courses) with paid employment as a contracted trainee. At the end of 1999 there were 455 school-based part-time trainees in New South Wales. They complete the same number of hours of formal training and work (1500–1600 hours) as full-time trainees. The structured training component of the traineeship (VET course) provides unit credit towards the HSC and may be delivered by the school, by TAFE or by another RTO. Most of their work time is outside school hours. Because of legislative requirements, in New South Wales part-time traineeships are only available in certain industry areas, and part-time apprenticeships are not yet available.

Trends and numbers in New South Wales

The number of students enrolled in VET-in-Schools in New South Wales during 1997–1999 is shown in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: VET-in-Schools participants, New South Wales, 1997–1999

Sector	1997	1998	1999
New South Wales			
Government school	14 014	16 433	17 059
Catholic school	4 258	4 855	4 239
Independent school	350	674	1 717
TAFE	23 600	24 500	22 693

Note: 'TAFE' students are those who are enrolled school students but attend TAFE for their VET courses (MCEETYA 2000)

New South Wales Catholic schools had an approximate increase of 30 per cent in VET-in-Schools student enrolments from 1999 to 2000. In school-delivered VET in 2000, Catholic schools had 5568 students. Of these, 102 were involved in traineeships.

Independent schools report a different pattern, as in this sector many VET-in-Schools programs involve joint arrangements with TAFE colleges. The Association of Independent Schools in New South Wales VET Officer reported, that the large increase of students doing VET-in-Schools programs between 1995 (295 students) and 1999 (1700 students) dropped in 2000 to 850 students, and 2001 figures are expected to be lower again. This was due to changes in funding arrangements in 2000, meaning that costs to parents of their children's engagement in VET courses became higher in some schools if large numbers enrolled in VET courses.

School students and workplaces in South Australia

In South Australia, VET-in-Schools activities come under the Enterprise and Vocational Education (EVE) Unit of the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE), which works in collaboration with schools, the Office of Vocational Education and Training (OVET) and TAFE institutes. To offer VET-in-Schools programs, schools need to be registered as an RTO or deliver programs under the auspices of an RTO. As in New South Wales, many schools are finding that the enormous increase in numbers of students in VET courses has strained both financial and human resources. Planning needs to involve industry as well as training links to ensure that the VET programs are in step with the employment potential in the region. Similar to the New South Wales Department,

DETE has emphasised pathways to make sure that the programs meet student needs and are relevant. Both stand-alone and embedded programs are offered.

Government schools

Work experience

In South Australia, most students have one week of work experience in Year 10 or Year 11. Some schools offer work experience as part of a work education subject. This subject involves extensive preparation for work experience. In Year 12 very few schools offer work experience. As in New South Wales, careers teachers are generally responsible for helping students find host employers.

VET-in-Schools and other

In South Australia, the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is undertaken in two stages that are separately assessed. Stage 1 is undertaken in Year 11 and Stage 2 in Year 12, although an increasing proportion of students are taking Stage 2 over two years in order to accommodate part-time work or other outside-school responsibilities, thus staying at school until Year 13. VET arrangements include:

- VET programs operating completely outside the school curriculum
- VET programs embedded within the school curriculum in various ways, such as part of a SACE subject.[2] This involves up to 40 hours training per subject in up to 8 units, all at Stage 1, under 'auspicing' agreements with TAFE
- school-based apprenticeships where training takes place at TAFE or other RTO or at a work site during school hours
- school-based traineeships, which take place completely outside school hours and are combined with part-time work
- two Stage 2 SACE subjects, Work Education and Vocational Studies, may have VET studies embedded in them, particularly in the former and optionally in the latter
- any SACE subject could potentially have VET studies embedded within it, up to 40 hours per subject. 'Embedded VET' is sometimes delivered by auspicing agreements, sometimes by TAFE, sometimes by a private RTO
- there are no stand-alone VET subjects at Year 12 (Stage 2 of SACE) yet, but currently three projects are investigating integrating VET into Stage 2 subjects with a TER attached[3]

Trends and numbers

The number of students enrolled in VET-in-Schools programs in South Australia during 1997–1999 is shown in table 3.2.

Table 3.2: VET-in-Schools participants, South Australia, 1997–1999

Sector	1997	1998	1999
South Australia			
Government school	2 417	8 907	12 046
Catholic school	1 081	3 219	3 703
Independent school	695	1 450	2 766

[2] Unit contribution of VET towards completing requirements of the SACE is recorded on the 'Statement of Results', but modules or units of competence are not listed.
[3] Achievement in VET modules or units competence, which may be embedded in Board-developed subjects, contributes to the study score which, in turn, is included in the calculation of the TER.

These figures indicate a rapid rise in all sectors, although the largest increase has been in government schools. It should be noted that in South Australia, government schools form a smaller proportion of the total school sector than in New South Wales.

Catholic schools in South Australia have seen a steady increase in student participation in VET-in-Schools programs over the past five years. The main impediments to implementing VET programs are time and money to support new initiatives. There also needs to be a shift in Year 12 subject options and in parent attitudes, perceptions and aspirations if there is to be an increase in participation.

Independent schools in South Australia have seen the numbers enrolled in VET-in-Schools virtually double each year from 1997 to 1999. Independent school students involved in traineeships and apprenticeships have also shown an increase. Nearly every independent school in South Australia currently delivers VET programs. Like other sectors, they are concerned about funding issues. Funding for VET-in-Schools comes from various sources on different funding cycles.

Areas of concern to policy-makers and other stakeholders

Interviews held during the course of the project with policy-makers, government officials and other stakeholders indicated some common areas of concern relating to school students and workplaces. Most of the following discussion relates to concerns about VET-in-Schools, since this was the area of interest of most of the stakeholders.

Equity issues

VET-in-Schools programs attempt to address equity issues on many levels, including through the funding arrangements. In South Australia, for example, there is a stringent requirement that no program excludes equity groups, and, in fact, when applying for funding, managers must indicate how they will ensure that equity groups will be included. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has shown commitment to achieving equity in providing VET programs for school students. There are special provisions for students with intellectual disabilities, with support both in class and in workplaces. Funding for the support of work placement has been specifically allocated to placements for students with disabilities, indigenous students, rural and remote students and students from non-English-speaking background (NESBs).

Some Aboriginal students, in particular, have experienced difficulties with vocational placements. School timetables and the need to travel to other locations for vocational placements are problems for some Aboriginal students and may not always prove culturally appropriate. The geographic or physical isolation of students, particularly Aboriginal students, is also potentially problematic. High levels of unemployment and situations of economic distress for rural and remote towns compress the opportunities for students. Sites may not be available, sites may be flooded with potential work placements, sites may be more than a little disenchanted with the growing expectations that are being placed on them for supervised training of school students. This is applicable to all students in small communities.

There have been some very innovative and leading-edge initiatives in some VET programs being offered to Aboriginal students. Interestingly, many of these initiatives involve students from Years 7 to 10, both to cater for 'at risk' students and because of the poor retention rates into senior school, which many of these initiatives are seeking to address. Many of these offer examples of community and enterprise-based learning options. Australia wide, a network of Aboriginal companies is offering opportunities for workplace experiences in areas such as art, eco and cultural tourism in dynamic and progressive programs. Some programs, such as the Vocational Educational Guidance for Aboriginal Students (VEGAS) program, offer study support for Aboriginal students. NESB students require a different level of cultural sensitivity and community partnerships. NESB students are reportedly under-represented in traditional apprenticeship trades.

Socioeconomic factors may influence students involved in experience in the workplace in a variety of ways. In some instances, these students may be from the second or third

generation of unemployment, so they lack working role models. The whole idea of work experience or placements may not be supported in the home, so the students are isolated in the experience. Lack of appropriate clothing and fares may also impede participation, and students may lack money to travel to less depressed areas where work is available. In rural and remote areas, employers may be over-used, with pressure to find both work experience and vocational placements for VET-in-Schools programs as well as limited numbers of paid part-time jobs.

The industry areas are still strongly gender-segregated. Parents may discourage girls from getting placements in non-traditional areas. Affirmative action approaches have been taken for equity groups, including Aboriginal students, girls and students at risk. An example is a program running in Western Sydney for girls from Middle Eastern backgrounds whose parents do not want them to attend TAFE or go to regular workplaces. This is the on-line delivery of the Information Technology Curriculum framework, and is also delivered to some rural and remote students. The girls do their learning on-line (delivered from a TAFE institute), and their work placements are partly in simulated environments and partly in primary schools that their parents approve of. Similarly, girls may be sent out in pairs for work experience to address cultural and gender concerns.

Funding and resourcing issues, including staffing

With the very rapid expansion of VET-in-Schools programs, the need to cope with funding and implementation has meant that for many stakeholders, administrative and practical issues may have overshadowed the time and space required to reflect on pedagogy and learning within these courses. Moves to expand vocational learning and workplace learning opportunities for junior secondary students could put even more pressure on the systems as they seek to accommodate increasing numbers of senior secondary students selecting VET courses. If pressures to perform shift the focus to mechanics rather than pedagogy and learning, the quality and innovative nature of VET programs will be compromised. Some of the issues that need to be addressed to ensure the continuation of such school-based vocational learning programs include:

- continuity and certainty of funding, particularly for VET co-ordinators and support funding to allow teachers workplace visit opportunities
- staffing issues, including availability of trained teachers with industry experience; continuity of staff so specific subjects can be offered, particularly in rural schools; training and professional development of staff[34]
- the good will and enthusiasm of many employers involved in vocational placements should not be diminished by too many demands being placed on workplaces through too many students seeking placements or poorly administered and organised programs because of insufficient support to schools or co-ordinating bodies
- the strategy of including VET-in-Schools subjects as part of the TER is intended to keep students' options open; it may also enhance the reputation of these subjects thus helping to ensure their continuance

Concerns about part-time work

There was a belief that a large proportion of school students were undertaking paid part-time work; generally it was believed that around half of Year 11 and 12 students might be involved. Stakeholders generally believed that students were exploited in such jobs, that they only learned a limited range of tasks, and that they were under considerable pressure from their employers. This pressure was both in relation to performance standards and in relation to the casual nature of the work, meaning that students could neither plan their schoolwork nor rely on a regular source of income. Some interviewees also believed that there was a competitive labour market for part-time work, meaning that some students wishing to work were excluded.

[34] The MCEETYA Task Force report includes a brief reference to teacher professional development and no reference to pre-service training for VET-in-Schools teachers.

Summary

The major features that can be drawn from the interviews and review of policy documents follow:

- Work experience is still the most widespread manner in which school students experience workplaces, but the policy attention paid to it is generally less than that paid to vocational placements and it is regarded by many commentators as inferior to vocational placements.
- Paid part-time work is the next most common form of experiencing workplaces. Although some policy interest is attached to part-time work, this relates mainly to capturing learning for VET-in-Schools accreditation.
- The smallest participation in workplace activities relates to VET-in-Schools, but this is the main area of concern for most stakeholders. Rapid increases in VET-in-Schools programs are strongly encouraged by governments, both Federal and State. However, those responsible for implementation report funding difficulties and concerns both about the quality of teaching and about the availability of sufficient host employers.
- There is a wish to improve the status of VET-in-Schools so that it is not seen as the province of less academically able students or of schools with lower status.
- Equity issues are a major area of concern, with State Governments implementing policies and programs both to ensure equitable participation in programs and to use workplace programs as a means of improving post-school employment outcomes for some groups of students.
- The major concerns of policy documents, policy-makers and policy-implementers are with programmatic and operational issues, and there is less attention paid to the learning that takes place in workplaces.

4 Research method

This chapter describes the purpose of the study, its four research questions, and the way in which the research was carried out during the 2000 school year. The sites of the research in New South Wales and South Australia are detailed. The difficulties experienced in the research process, and the possible effects that these may have had on the data which were produced, are explained. The chapter concludes with a description of the analysis and writing-up process and the way in which the findings were validated.

Purpose and desired outcomes

The purpose of the study was to determine what school students' experiences of the workplace were in each of three types of workplace activity—paid part-time work, work experience and vocational placements—and, in particular, what types of training and learning took place. It set out to examine the structural arrangements under which work was obtained and experienced; the different types of learning which were experienced by students in the different types of activity; and the relative importance placed on that learning by their schools and also by future employers. An important aim was to establish whether any particular equity groups were experiencing difficulties in accessing any, or all of the three, types of workplace activity. Finally, the project aimed to establish a body of knowledge which policy-makers might examine in order to decide whether any changes need to be made to school curriculum and/or entry-level training programs. The database could provide the foundation for a longitudinal survey examining the effects of the different modes of experiencing the workplace, and their associated learning, upon later employment.

Research questions

The four research questions for the project were used as the basis for the research and analysis of the data. They were as follows:

1 What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

   What proportion of Year 10, 11 and 12 students undertake paid work, work experience, vocational placements? Under what human resources conditions is paid work undertaken, and what levels of responsibility do the young people achieve? What relationship does participation have with career goals? Has the advent of VET-in-Schools affected work experience programs?

2 What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

   What formal and informal training is provided in each of these modes of experiencing the workplace? What learning takes place? How transferable is the learning from one mode to another, and into full-time paid work? How might such learning be integrated into school curricula and other entry-level VET programs?

3 Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

   Does participation in any or all of these modes of experiencing the workplace vary with factors such as Aboriginality, NESB, socioeconomic status, location (urban/rural) and gender?

4 What effects do such experiences of the workplace have on later access to employment and higher education?

The foundation for a later study will be built by gaining a database of students willing to participate in a longitudinal study.

Initial stages of the project

Reference group

A national reference group was set up which represented stakeholders in the research area. It included:

- VET-in-Schools government education personnel from New South Wales and South Australia
- an industry representative
- a researcher from the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) who had been responsible for analysing the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) data on student working
- an academic
- a school student in Year 11

During the life of the project the reference group read and commented on draft questionnaires and reports, and met for a teleconference to determine priorities for data analysis.

Search of LSAY data

The LSAY carried out by ACER includes some questions about school students' part-time work (reported in Robinson 1996 & 1999). Consultations were held with ACER staff members during September–December 1999, and the data were examined both to ensure that the current study did not provide unnecessary duplication and to inform the development of the study.

The LSAY project was preceded by, and grew out of, two earlier programs, the *Australian Youth Survey* (AYS) and the *Youth in Transition* (YIT) survey. LSAY provide wide-ranging national data on youth. The information from the surveys is used to examine aspects of their lives over some years. Successive cohorts of students are studied as they move from school into post-secondary education and/or work. The links between social characteristics, education and training, and employment are explored in detail in various analyses. Issues investigated in the LSAY project include school achievement and school completion, participation in vocational and university education, and employment.

The most recent phase of the LSAY project began in 1995 with a national stratified sample of Year 9 students, and a second Year 9 cohort was added in 1998. New cohorts are added every three years. The initial contact, and data collection, is through schools. After that point, the annual data collection is direct with sample members (by questionnaire during the first two years and following this by telephone interview), continuing up to the age of 25.

ACER has published numerous reports on particular aspects of the data. The time lapse between the gathering and analysis of the data can create difficulties. Thus the two LSAY reports (Robinson 1996 and Robinson 1999), referred to in the literature review (chapter 2), while extremely valuable, are based on data collected in the early 1990s. Thus the current study is extremely timely in updating the earlier LSAY data. Moreover the LSAY surveys deal more broadly with participation in education, training and employment and, so, have not attempted to address the question of students' learning at work.

The survey questions used in LSAY were examined for possible use in the project but were found not to be appropriate. Therefore, the LSAY data provided some background information and context rather than being directly useful to the current project. Moreover there were found to be some problems with accessing the LSAY data. Thus, although it was originally intended to spend some time analysing the data, this part of the project plan was not pursued.

Literature review

A review of literature relating to school students' work experience, vocational placements and part-time work was carried out, with a focus upon literature relating to learning from these experiences. In addition, the general literature on workplace learning, particularly that relating specifically to teenage workers, was briefly summarised. The literature review was presented in chapter 2.

Project web site

A web site was set up, which was augmented as the project progressed. The web site address was given in information leaflets so that participants and other interested people could get more information about the project. The web site can be found at <www.unisa.edu.au/creew/>.

Consultation with 16 key stakeholders around Australia

Sixteen consultations were carried out between September 1999 and May 2000 with people with policy or scholarly expertise in the project area (see appendix 1 for list of names). The interviews mainly related to current practices, the activities of peak bodies, and the thinking and future directions of senior policy-makers and implementers of practice. Chapter 3 is drawn partly from these consultations.

Ethics approval was sought and successfully gained from the:

- Department of Education and Training New South Wales
- Department of Education, Training and Employment South Australia
- University of South Australia

The questionnaire

Development of the survey instrument.

The survey instrument (which is shown in appendix 2) was developed over a period of several months and as a result of extensive consultation and informal trialling. A formal pilot was carried out in June 2000 at a small rural school in New South Wales, and extensive modifications were made as a result of the pilot.

The development of the survey questions was informed by a number of factors, including:

- project members' experience in working with young people
- examination of other questionnaires for young people
- literature relating to work experience and vocational placements
- literature relating to students' part-time work
- general workplace learning literature
- training and human resource management literature
- existing classifications such as key competencies, ABS ANZSIC codes
- assistance from teenage children of the research team and colleagues

There was a continual tension between the wish to ask as many questions as possible, in an as open-ended manner as possible, the realisation that the respondents' concentration span and goodwill would be limited, and that data analysis time was limited by the project budget.

Administration

The survey was administered during August–November 2000 in 13 schools—six in New South Wales and seven in South Australia. The schools were selected by the research team

in consultation with the State Education Departments in an attempt to achieve representativeness with relation to:

- school sector (government/Catholic/independent)
- rural/metropolitan mix
- socioeconomic mix
- proportions of NESB and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students

Table 4.1 shows the schools that were surveyed and their characteristics. Please note that pseudonyms are employed for New South Wales schools throughout this report.

Table 4.1: Schools at which the questionnaire was administered and their characteristics

Name	State	Type	Urban/ rural	Special features
Wattle School	NSW	Independent	Urban	Baptist, low socioeconomic
West Hill High	NSW	Public	Urban	Western suburbs, high NESB
Hill High	NSW	Public	Rural	Large town, mixed school
Treedera High	NSW	Public	Rural	Small town, high Aboriginal population
Plains Central	NSW	Public	Rural	Central school, remote town
Jarrah High	NSW	Public	Rural	Small town, low socioeconomic, long involvement in VET programs
Wilderness Girls	SA	Independent	Urban	High socioeconomic, girls only, some boarders
Christies Beach High	SA	Public	Urban	Outer suburbs, focus on VET programs
Salisbury East High	SA	Public	Urban	Outer suburbs, low socioeconomic
Xavier College, Gawler	SA	Independent	Urban	Fringes of city, Catholic independent
St Michael's College	SA	Catholic	Urban	Nearly all boys, high NESB
Bethesda Christian College	SA	Independent	Urban	Small Christian school
Brighton Secondary	SA	Public	Urban	Large school, majority middle-class

Table 4.2: Numbers of responses, by school

Name	State	Type	Count	% of total responses	Male	Female
Wattle	NSW	Independent	160	11.1	81	78
West Hill	NSW	Public	31	2.2	9	21
Hill High	NSW	Public	34	2.4	20	14
Treedera High	NSW	Public	64	4.4	31	33
Plains Central	NSW	Public	10	0.7	2	8
Jarrah High	NSW	Public	23	1.6	19	4
Wilderness Girls	SA	Independent	192	13.3	-	192
Christies Beach High	SA	Public	209	14.5	91	117
Salisbury East	SA	Public	79	5.5	36	43
Xavier College, Gawler	SA	Independent	148	10.3	62	84
St Michaels	SA	Catholic	146	10.1	142	4
Bethesda	SA	Independent	86	6.0	42	44
Brighton	SA	Public	259	18.0	127	128
Totals			**1441**		**662**	**770**

Notes: (i) The total of 1441 is ten less than the 1451 total responses received. Ten students omitted to enter their school name
(ii) A small number of students did not record their gender

Originally, the intention was to survey only Year 10 and Year 12 students in the schools. Consultations with the South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment (South Australia DETE) indicated that South Australian students normally do their work experience in Year 11 (in New South Wales, it is normally in Year 10). Hence, there was a need to include Year 11 students in the study. Although, in fact, it became evident during the administration of the questionnaire that South Australian schools did often have work experience in Year 10, the inclusion of Year 11 students was beneficial, as they had a wider range of workplace activities than Year 10 students, while Year 12 students were thinly represented owing to study commitments. The 13th school (Brighton Secondary) was added because returns from public schools were low and the sample was unduly biased towards independent schools. By the inclusion of Brighton, the public school share of the sample was boosted to almost 50 per cent. In total, 1451 usable responses were received.

Difficulties in administration

It was difficult to gain agreement from schools to participate in the study. Several refused, often claiming that they were 'over-researched'. Replacement schools were sought, which replaced the original profile of schools. This was not altogether successful; notably, when an Adelaide school with a high Aboriginal student population dropped out, it was difficult to find a similar replacement. New South Wales public schools were particularly difficult to access, partly because the impending Olympic Games had created extra stress and shortened timelines for normal school activities. Independent schools found it easier to obtain co-operation from their students to complete the questionnaire and, because of their smaller size, found it easier to gather students together.

Because of the difficulties gaining access, the research team needed to meet schools' conditions for administration. The most common was that, instead of the researchers administering the questionnaire and being available to answer queries and assist students, schools administered the questionnaire themselves. The most usual way for this to happen was during home group periods. With responsibility for administration spread across a number of teachers otherwise unconnected with the study, response rates in those schools were inevitably lower than hoped and students did not necessarily receive the assistance which the length and complexity of the questionnaire required. Although guidelines were produced for the administering teachers, the research team was not able to monitor what actually happened. Finally, there is no way of knowing whether the students who completed the questionnaire were typical of their school population. In the cases of those schools with very high returns, representativeness can more readily be assumed than in the cases of those schools where returns were very low.

Problems in the data

A common problem with the data was that students answered in section 3 (work experience) for more than one period of work experience and in section 4 (paid work) for more than one paid job. This meant that responses to some questions were not valid. While the doubling up in section 4 was a result of students not reading instructions correctly (and not having the assistance which had been anticipated), the problem with section 3 was a design fault. The research team had not anticipated that students may have had more than one period of work experience. Were the survey to be repeated in other States this problem would need to be addressed. The other major problem was that questions 13 and 14 required students to enter the *number* of each type of workplace experience they had undertaken. This was an attempt to map the full extent of students' workplace activities. However, most students merely *ticked* the appropriate boxes, while some entered very large numbers—evidently recording the number of times they had *attended* that workplace. A decision was made, therefore, to treat all responses (ticks or numbers) as ticks. Apart from these difficulties, the questionnaire was generally well completed, although, as anticipated, some students' answering became sporadic as they proceeded through the questionnaire.

Qualitative data

School case studies

Five school case studies were carried out, with an additional focus group of Year 12 students to compensate for the under-representation of Year 12 students in the questionnaire responses and in the school case studies. Because of the over-representation of non-government schools in the questionnaire responses, it was decided to confine case studies to public schools. It was also decided to try to gain access to schools that had a high VET focus, as the responses on vocational placements to the questionnaire had been disappointing. This method of selecting cases is described by Patton (1989) as purposive sampling. Case studies were carried out at Plains Central and Treedera at the same time as the questionnaires were administered there. This was to save travel costs and, in the case of Plains Central, to serve as a pilot for the other case studies. This case study was also useful in serving as a pilot for the other case studies. Table 4.3 shows the schools at which case studies took place.

Table 4.3: School-based case studies

Name	State	Type	Urban/rural	Special features
Murray Bridge	SA	Public	Rural	High Aboriginal enrolment
Le Fevre	SA	Public	Urban	High Aboriginal enrolment
Maidstone Boys	NSW	Public	Urban	Boys only
Plains Central	NSW	Public	Rural	Remote
Treedera	NSW	Public	Rural	High Aboriginal enrolment
Year 12 group	NSW	Mainly public	Rural	Specially convened group of students from several schools in and near Wagga Wagga

In the school case studies, focus groups were convened of teachers involved with students and workplaces. These were normally VET and careers teachers. Either one or two focus groups of students were also convened in each school. Student and teacher focus groups were held separately, although in two cases a teacher sat in on the student group.[5] Researchers requested of schools that the students selected for the focus groups should span, if possible, Years 10 to 12 and should be representative of the ethnic mix of the school. It was also requested that students in the focus groups should have experienced at least two out of the three types of workplace activity (work experience, vocational placements and paid part-time work). An additional Year 12 focus group was held because of low representation of Year 12 students in the case studies. The case study protocol can be found in appendix 3. A semi-structured approach (Minichiello et al. 1995) was used for the focus groups, with the protocol being used as a guide only. Case study reports were written up in a descriptive manner (Wolcott 1994), using the four research questions as organising themes (Stake 1995). The reports can be found in appendix 4.

Employer interviews

Four sets of interviews were held with employers who were involved in students' workplace activities. In two cases—Plains and Adelaide—focus groups were convened. In Treedera and Sydney separate interviews, either face-to-face or by telephone, needed to be carried out because it was not possible to persuade employers to meet as a group. As is usual with such interviews and focus groups, although time-consuming to arrange, the level of enthusiasm of employers for the research process was notable, with great amounts of information being offered to the researchers. Numbers of participants are shown in table 4.4.

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[5] In these two cases, the teacher's presence did not appear to inhibit student responses at all.

Table 4.4: Employer interviews

Location	State	Urban/rural	Nature of interviews	No. of participants
Sydney	NSW	Urban	Focus group	5
Plains	NSW	Rural	Focus group	2
Treedera	NSW	Rural	Interviews	3
Adelaide	SA	Urban	Focus group	11

The protocol for employer interviews can be found in appendix 3. The reports of the interviews for each location were written up, as with the case studies, using the four research questions, and are at appendix 5.

It should be noted that in all cases except Adelaide the bulk of employers were recommended by the local school or, in the case of Sydney, a work-placement organisation. Therefore, there is a possibility that the employers may have been selected as those carrying out 'good practice' rather than representative of the full variety of employers involved with school students.

Data analysis

After the initial quantitative data entry, and before the production of the second interim report, a researchers' workshop was held in Adelaide to decide on the form which data analysis should take. This resulted in the production of a number of tables and other statistical reports for the interim report. Once the full data entry process was complete, a teleconference with the reference group as well as the research team was convened with the sole purpose of determining priorities for data analysis as it had become evident that the amount of data collected could not all be analysed within the available budget. The reference group made several suggestions for data analysis, based partly on what they saw as policy priorities. The resulting quantitative data analysis is presented, using the research questions as headings, in chapters 5 and 6. All of the survey questions were at least partially analysed for chapters 5 and 6, although the qualitative comments from the survey could not be analysed.

The data from the case studies and the employer reports was used for a cross-case analysis where similarities and differences between cases and issues raised by the employers were discussed, once more using the research questions as sub-headings. Finally, both sets of data analysis were used to draw out major issues arising from the project (chapter 8). It was noted that there was a general amount of concurrence between the results from the survey and the case studies/employer groups, and the initial input from the key stakeholders, suggesting that the results were reliable. This had been achieved through the use of triangulation of methods and sources (Huberman & Miles 1998), or as Grbich (1999, p.18) puts it, 'overlapping the results at several points to enhance reliability'.

It should be noted that the fourth and final research question relating to the effects which students' workplace activities have on later access to further education and full-time employment was not designed to be answered in any depth by this study. It was merely anticipated that a database of students willing to take part in a later study would be established. This was achieved with 433 students completing forms giving names and contact details. In addition, the case studies and employer interviews yielded a small amount of data relating to this research question.

Validation of findings amongst stakeholders

The research team was mindful of the fact that there might be factors of which they were unaware which might explain certain features of the data. Therefore, once the draft report had been prepared, copies were sent to key people for validation. These people consisted of the majority of the key stakeholders who had been consulted at the beginning of the project, as well as the project reference group and a small number of other practitioners who had expressed interest in being involved. As an additional check, the chapter on

current policy and practice was checked with senior people in the relevant New South Wales and South Australian Government departments.

Summary

In order to answer the first three research questions, and to provide a basis for future research into the fourth, a variety of research methods were employed. These were:

- consultations with key stakeholders
- literature review
- survey in 13 schools
- case studies in five schools and a Year 12 focus group
- employer interviews—group and individual
- validation of findings by stakeholders

A process of 'constant comparative analysis' (Glaser & Strauss 1967) was employed by which, throughout the length of the project, data gathered from the various research methods were compared and discussed among the research team, reference group, and external stakeholders.

Difficulties were encountered during the research process. These included:

- gaining access to schools
- uneven response rates—higher response rates from non-government than government schools
- small numbers of certain groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, despite efforts being made to include schools having students with such characteristics
- lower returns from New South Wales than South Australian schools
- errors in survey completion owing, in the main, to several cases where researchers were unable personally to administer the questionnaire

Despite these difficulties, the findings from the various data sources appear to be reliable, as they concur with each other, with published literature and with anecdotal evidence.

5 Findings from the survey: The extent and nature of students' workplace activities

This chapter describes some of the findings from the survey of Year 10, 11 and 12 school students, which was carried out in 13 schools in New South Wales and South Australia in the second half of 2000, and attracted 1451 usable responses. Chapter 4 has described the research method used, some of the problems which were encountered in the administration of the survey, and some of the problems in the data which became apparent as data entry and analysis proceeded. Thus the findings reported in this chapter need to be interpreted with an understanding of the difficulties described in chapter 4.

This chapter uses the survey data to provide insight into the project's first and third research questions:

- *What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10 and Year 12 school students experience the workplace?*
- *Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?*

Profile of respondents

The profile of the 1451 respondents, as derived from responses to questions in section 1 of the questionnaire (which is at appendix 2), is as follows. In some cases, a small number of students omitted to answer the relevant questions, hence the percentages do not always total 100 per cent.

Profile of the 1451 respondents to the questionnaire

Type of school: Public—48.7%; Independent—40.4%; Catholic—10.1%

State: New South Wales 22.2% (322 students); South Australia 77.1% (1119 students)

School year: Year 10—56.1%; Year 11—26.7%; Year 12—17.2%

Age: 15—45.7%; 16—31.9%; 17—18.5%; 18—3.3%; other 0.7%

Gender: Male—42.9%; Female—57.1%

Ethnic background: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander—1.5%; NESB (English not the main language spoken at home)—6%; NESB parent (at least one parent born outside Australia in a non-English-speaking country)—20.8%

Disability: Physical—1.9%; Learning—2.7%

Socioeconomic status (self-defined): Above average—22.4%; About average—71.5%; Below average—6.1%

Academic ability (self-defined): Above average—26.5%; About average—66%; Below average—7.5%

Planned school-leaving year: Year 10—2%; Year 11—4.1%; Year 12—82.9%; unsure—11.1%

Planned post-school destination: University—54.7%; TAFE full time—14.4%; Apprenticeship—4.8%; Traineeship—1.5%; Other work—4.3%; Not sure—16.5%; Other 4%

What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

The students were asked (in section 2 of the questionnaire) to indicate which of 11 modes of experiencing workplaces they had undertaken. Responses for each mode are shown in figure 5.1 and table 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Involvement in different modes of experiencing the workplace (% of all students)

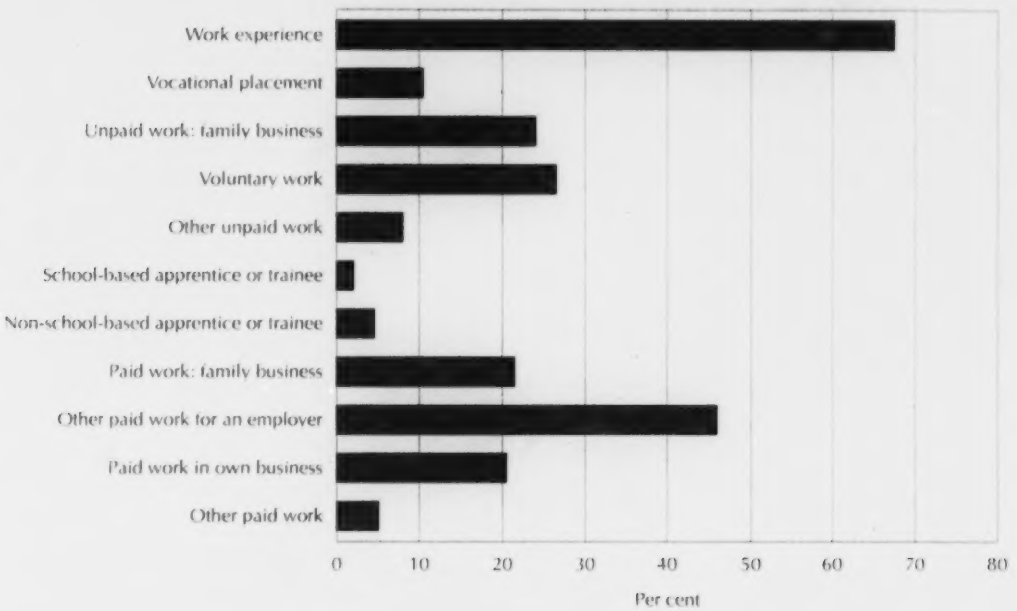


Table 5.1 Extent of workplace activities, unpaid and paid

Unpaid	Work experience	Vocational placement	Family business	Voluntary work	Other unpaid work
Count	985.0	153.0	342.0	383.0	115.0
% of all students	67.9	10.5	23.6	26.4	7.9

Paid	School-based apprentice/ traineeship	Non-school-based app./ traineeship	Family business	Other paid work for employer	Own business	Other paid
Count	23.0	64.0	308.0	678.0	296.0	69.0
% of all students	1.6	4.4	21.2	46.7	20.4	4.8

The results show that just over two-thirds of the respondents had done work experience, but only about one-tenth had done vocational placements. Work experience (in some schools) and vocational placements (in most schools) may not be available until Year 11. There were very small numbers involved in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships, with more of these students arranging their own than participating in schools-based programs. Nearly one-half of the students had 'ordinary' part-time work for an employer, and around one-fifth had their 'own business' (which appeared predominantly, but not exclusively, to be babysitting).

Students had also experienced workplaces in other ways. Around one-quarter had done voluntary work for a charity or community organisation, with almost 8 per cent carrying out other unpaid work, including unpaid babysitting, helping at Sunday school, housework, helping in parents' workplaces and helping in friends' businesses. Several students also put 'work shadowing' under this heading, which is a form of workplace education that had not been addressed in the questionnaire. Almost five per cent reported 'other paid work' outside the categories provided: the types of work reported here included cleaning, lawn mowing, and sports umpiring and coaching.

The data show that altogether 60 per cent of the respondents had had formal paid work (not including 'own business'); when family businesses were excluded, the figure drops to 50.1 per cent. Family businesses, including farms, were very common places to gain workplace experience. In fact, 12.1 per cent of students had done both paid and unpaid work in a family business, with an additional 9.1 per cent who had done paid work only and 11.4 per cent unpaid work only in a family business.

Further analysis reveals that the mix of work experience, placements and formal jobs was as follows (formal jobs exclude 'own business' and 'other paid work' jobs—that is, they include only paid work for an employer including family businesses):

- 44 per cent of students had done work experience and had undertaken at least one formal paid job
- 24.3 per cent had done work experience but had not undertaken a formal paid job
- 9.4 per cent had undertaken a formal paid job but had not done work experience
- 7 per cent of students had done work experience, a vocational placement and had undertaken at least one formal paid job
- 14.6 per cent of students had had none of these workplace experiences
- 20.7 per cent of those who had had formal paid work (and 14.9% of all students) had had more than one regular paid job at the one time

Table 5.2 shows engagement in workplace experiences broken down by State, by type of school (government/non-government), and by urban/rural location.[26]

While there appeared to be considerable differences between New South Wales and South Australian schools, these differences may be misleading. Comparable schools in each State were not selected, since it was not a purpose of the study to compare the two States with each other. Thus, for example, there were no rural schools in South Australia but several in New South Wales. There appears to be a large difference between the percentage of students who had done work experience, but this related to the fact that in New South Wales work experience was always in Year 10 whereas in South Australia some schools did not do it until Year 11. Table 5.3 is for Year 11 and Year 12 students only and shows more comparable figures for the two States, although, in general, the South Australian students appeared to be engaging with workplaces less than New South Wales students.[27]

Some clear differences were evident between government and non-government schools. Non-government students were more likely to have done voluntary work and to have worked in family business and 'own businesses' but, in other respects, their engagement with workplaces was less than public school students. A variety of reasons could be suggested for this, some relating to school policies and some relating to the family circumstances of non-government students compared with government school students. Rural students had considerable more access to workplace experiences than urban students. This could be owing to economic pressures, or it could be owing to schools or parents encouraging students to experience workplaces because such experiences might enhance job prospects. The percentage of rural students in vocational placements was particularly high at 29.77 per cent, almost three times the average. Involvement in family

[26] The location refers to the location of the school; a small number of students at particular schools were boarders, but their home location was not recorded. Qualitative comments from these students indicated that these students may have had particular patterns of part-time work; for example, working only during the school holidays at home.

[27] This may not be representative; MCEETYA figures show the average amount of time per students spent in workplaces to be greater in 1999 in South Australia than New South Wales. However, the MCEETYA figures refer only to government schools.

businesses was particularly high in rural areas; these businesses presumably included farms as well as small retail and other businesses.

Table 5.2: Involvement in workplace experiences, by State, type of school and urban/rural

	NSW (%)	SA (%)	Government (%)	Non-government (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	All students (%)
Work experience	88.5	62.6	69.7	66.9	66.6	86.3	67.9
Vocational placement	16.5	8.9	11.8	9.4	8.7	29.8	10.5
Unpaid work: family business.	28.3	22.4	18.8	28.7	22.4	37.4	23.6
Voluntary work	34.5	24.3	21.3	31.9	25.6	36.6	26.4
Other unpaid work	8.1	8.0	6.3	9.6	8.0	7.6	7.9
School-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	3.1	1.2	1.9	1.3	1.5	2.3	1.6
Non-school-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	9.3	3.0	4.7	4.2	3.9	9.9	4.4
Paid work in family business	29.5	19.0	16.1	26.7	20.2	32.8	21.2
Other paid work for an employer	55.9	44.5	49.9	44.2	46.4	53.4	46.7
Paid work in own 'business'	23.9	19.6	17.1	24.2	20.5	21.4	20.4
Other paid work	4.7	4.8	4.5	5.1	4.8	4.6	4.8

Notes: The figures for school-based and non-school-based apprenticeships and traineeships look somewhat high for New South Wales. Examination of the location of the students ticking these categories revealed that there were concentrations of such students at certain schools (in South Australia as well as New South Wales); this was particularly so for the non-school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (not just those which were school-based, where concentrations at certain schools might have been expected). This suggests either that particular factors existed at certain schools or in certain localities, or that at some schools the students misunderstood the meaning of the terms.

Table 5.3: Workplace experiences, Year 11 and 12 students only, New South Wales, South Australia and both States

	Yrs 11 & 12 NSW (%)	Yrs 11 & 12 SA (%)	Yrs 11 & 12 All (%)
Work experience	90.9	86.6	87.5
Vocational placement	30.7	14.5	17.9
Unpaid work: family bus.	22.2	22.0	22.1
Volunt. work	33.3	28.7	29.7
Other unpaid	6.5	5.9	6.0
School-based apprentice	3.3	1.7	2.0
Non-school-based apprentice	6.5	4.1	4.6
Paid work: family business	29.4	16.5	19.2
Other paid work for an employer	60.1	52.7	54.2
Paid work in own business	20.9	23.2	22.8
Other paid work	5.9	4.5	4.8

Table 5.4 illustrates variations in workplace experiences by student characteristics with relation to self-reported socioeconomic status and self-reported academic ability. The

profile of respondents earlier in this chapter indicates that there was a tendency for students to place themselves in the middle group for both indicators, although there was more variation in 'academic ability' than 'family finances'. 71.5 per cent placed themselves in the 'average' category for family finances, compared with 66 per cent for academic ability.

There were some differences by 'family finances' in engagement in workplace experiences that could be explained by a variety of factors. For example, the above-average engagement in ordinary paid work by below-average income children could indicate the necessity of working to help support the family, yet above-average children were also working more than the average. With regard to academic ability, the data support common assertions (for example Teese, Davies & Ryan 1997) that vocational placements are more common amongst lower ability students. Both school-based and non-school-based apprenticeships and traineeships were also more common amongst the students of lower academic ability. Such children were less likely than the average to be involved in either family businesses or their own businesses.

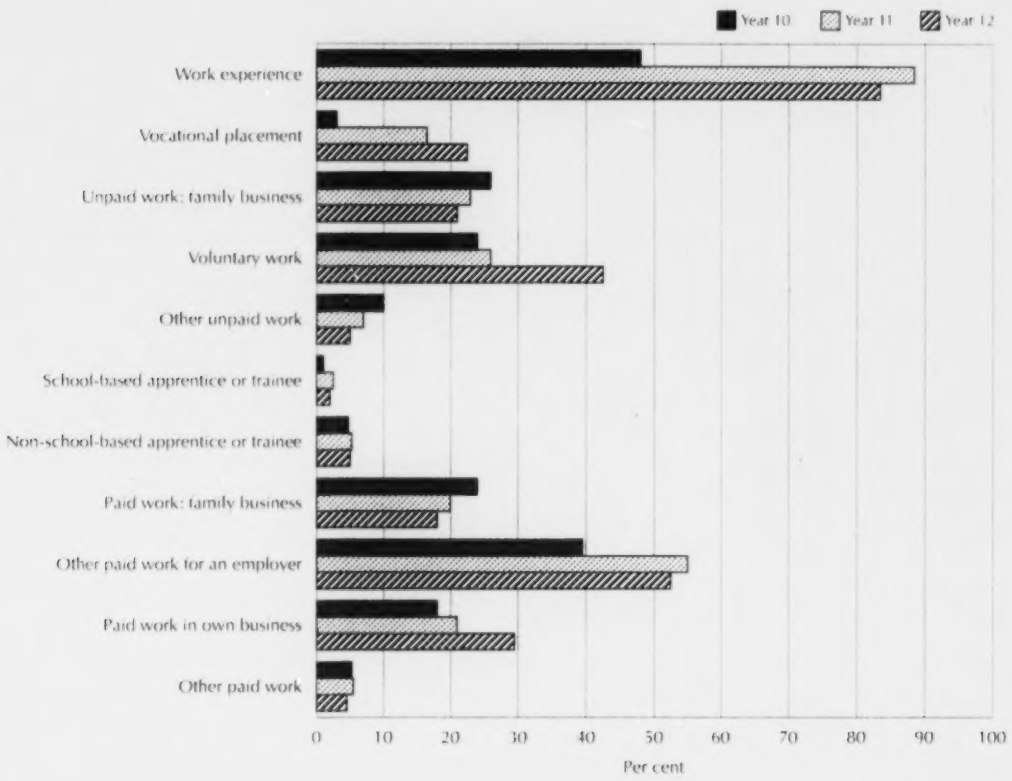
Table 5.4: Involvement in workplace experiences, by self-reported family finances and self-reported academic ability

	Family finances			Academic ability			
	Above average (%)	Average (%)	Below average (%)	Above average (%)	Average (%)	Below average (%)	All students (%)
Work experience	75.0	66.7	76.0	70.4	67.1	71.0	67.9
Vocational placement	9.9	11.4	9.4	7.4	11.7	14.0	10.5
Unpaid work: family business	27.1	23.0	25.0	25.4	24.8	13.1	23.6
Voluntary work	29.9	25.9	28.1	34.1	24.4	21.5	26.4
Other unpaid work	9.5	7.5	8.3	8.7	7.9	5.1	7.9
School-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	1.1	1.7	1.0	0.8	1.5	3.7	1.6
Non-school-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	5.3	4.4	2.1	1.9	5.2	8.4	4.4
Paid work in family business	27.1	20.3	16.7	20.4	22.5	15.9	21.2
Other paid work for an employer	49.7	46.5	53.1	49.7	47.1	41.1	46.7
Paid work in own 'business'	25.7	19.4	20.8	24.3	20.4	10.3	20.4
Other paid work	5.7	4.6	6.3	4.2	5.2	3.7	4.8

Analysis of workplace experiences by year level (figure 5.2) reveals some interesting features. Since the questions about engagement in these experiences asked about whether students had ever had these experiences, in general involvement in each experience might be expected to increase more or less gradually through the year levels. This occurred for structured work placements, own business and voluntary work (the latter shows a big jump in Year 12, suggesting to the cynical that students were augmenting their CVs before seeking work or university entry). In the case of work experience, however, a lower percentage of Year 12 students than Year 11 students reported having been involved. This suggests that work experience has very recently become more widespread (or, perhaps, that particular school factors explain this seeming anomaly). A similar phenomenon can be observed for involvement in 'other paid work for an employer', suggesting that this also is becoming more of a normal practice. Smaller numbers of Year 12 students than Year 10 and 11 students reported involvement in family businesses, suggesting either that paid work in family businesses was becoming more common or, perhaps, suggesting that

older students had forgotten, or ascribed no importance to, their former engagement in family businesses.

Figure 5.2: Percentage involvement in different modes of experiencing the workplace, by year level



Involvement of Year 10 students in 'other paid work for an employer'—that is, 'ordinary part-time jobs'—was 39.4 per cent compared with 54.8 per cent in Year 11 and 52.5 per cent for Year 12 students. As well as an increase in the frequency of part-time work from Year 10 to Year 11, there was also a slight increase in the number of hours worked (as shown in table 5.5). Year 12 students were working slightly shorter hours, possibly to devote more time to their HSC or SACE studies. However, there was also a slightly higher proportion of Year 12 students working very long hours (over 21 hours a week).

Table 5.5: Number of hours of paid work undertaken in the week prior to completing the questionnaire (those in paid work only)

	Year 10 students (%)	Year 11 students (%)	Year 12 students (%)	All students (%)
1–5 hours	45.5	37.6	46.3	42.2
6–10 hours	23.8	26.3	27.8	25.5
11–15 hours	16.0	20.4	14.8	17.7
16–20 hours	10.3	10.7	4.6	9.7
21 hours and above	4.4	5.0	6.5	5.0
Mean number of hours worked	8.4	8.8	7.7	8.50

It had been intended to analyse the data by the students' intended year of leaving school, but the numbers expecting to leave in Years 10 or 11 were too low to make this exercise meaningful. However, it was possible to analyse the data by intended post-school destinations (table 5.6). It should be borne in mind that 54.7 per cent of students said they

intended to go to university straight after school, whereas only about 30 per cent of school students generally do so. Therefore, either many of those who were intending to go on to university probably will not do so, or an alternative explanation could be that the sample was disproportionately weighted towards university-bound students.

As might be expected, students who identified as university bound were less likely to have undertaken a vocational placement than average, while those bound for apprenticeships or TAFE courses were more likely to have undertaken a placement. University-bound students were more likely than the average to have undertaken voluntary work and more likely than nearly any other group to have had 'ordinary' paid jobs. The only group more likely to have had ordinary paid jobs was those students intending to go straight into ordinary paid work after school. Those students intending to go into apprenticeships were the most likely to have been engaged in unpaid or paid family businesses (indicating that perhaps a parent was in an apprenticed trade). Students intending to go directly into a full-time TAFE course appeared to have lower participation in most types of workplace activity than the average, with a particularly low level of engagement in work experience.

Table 5.6: Workplace activities, by intended destination immediately after leaving school

	Uni.	TAFE	Apprentice-ship	Trainee-ship	Other FT/PT work	Not sure	Other	All students
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Work experience	74.9	54.6	61.7	80.8	71.0	59.5	74.6	67.9
Vocational placement	6.6	13.1	26.6	11.5	14.5	12.3	12.7	10.5
Unpaid work: family business	27.8	13.6	30.9	15.4	20.3	17.5	22.2	23.6
Voluntary work	32.8	13.1	25.5	23.1	21.7	18.7	31.8	26.4
Other unpaid work	7.9	9.7	11.7	7.7	10.1	4.8	7.9	7.9
School-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	1.0	0.6	4.3	0.0	4.4	2.0	0.0	1.6
Non-school-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	4.6	2.3	10.6	11.5	0.0	4.00	3.2	4.4
Paid work in family business	23.1	13.1	24.5	26.9	26.1	17.9	20.6	21.2
Other paid work for an employer	51.0	38.6	42.6	42.3	56.5	40.5	49.1	46.7
Paid work in own 'business'	25.9	16.5	13.8	3.9	14.5	14.3	22.2	20.4
Other paid work	4.0	5.1	2.1	11.5	4.4	5.6	9.5	4.8

Industry area of workplace activities

The figures in the remaining tables in this chapter (except where otherwise mentioned) were derived from sections 3, 4 and 5 of the survey, which asked students to give further details about one of their experiences (the longest lasting) in each of work experience, paid work and vocational placement (where applicable).

Table 5.7 shows the industry area in which students' workplace activities took place. The students were asked to answer for their *longest lasting* period of work experience, paid job or vocational placement. The industry areas were slightly adapted from Australian and New Zealand Standard Industry Classification (ANZSIC) codes. Some students had

difficulty allocating their responses to an industry area; where possible, researchers made appropriate allocations during the data entry process. It was notable that the students appeared to find their paid jobs easier to classify by industry than their work experience.

Table 5.7: Industry area of workplace activities

	Work experience		Paid work		Vocational placement	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Farming, forestry, fishing, mining	31	3.0	38	5.1	1	1.4
Manufacturing	84	8.2	24	3.2	16	21.6
Building including electrical and plumbing	45	4.4	14	1.9	7	9.5
Retailing	183	17.9	237	31.7	9	12.2
Fast foods, cafés, or restaurants	71	6.9	233	31.2	27	36.5
Cultural, recreational or sporting	63	6.2	45	6.0	-	-
Banking/real estate/insurance	34	3.3	6	.8	-	-
Gov't admin. including education and defence	141	13.8	3	.4	5	6.8
Health, personal & community services (including child care)	203	19.9	29	3.9	5	6.8
Communications/media/computing	118	11.5	16	2.1	1	1.4
Babysitting	N/A	N/A	51	6.8	N/A	N/A
Newspaper delivery	N/A	N/A	22	2.9	N/A	N/A
Other	49	4.8	29	3.9	3	4.1
Total	**1022**	**100.0**	**747**	**100.0**	**74**	**100.0**

Table 5.7 shows very clear differences between paid work and work experience. As might be expected, 62.9 per cent of paid student workers worked in retail or fast food, cafés and restaurants, while only 24.8 per cent of work experience students were in those industries. Work experience placements were far more likely than paid work to be in 'career'-type industries such as education or health, personal and community services. These are industries that do not offer much opportunity for part-time teenage employment. Vocational placements showed a different pattern again. The relatively small number of placement students was clustered in certain industry areas.[3] Retail and fast food/cafés/restaurants covered 48.9 per cent of students so the industry distribution was not unlike paid work, except for the large minority of placement students in manufacturing.

Nature of the workplace and the work

It was clear from the data in sections 3, 4 and 5 of the questionnaire that students were experiencing different things in the different types of experiences. For example, table 5.8 shows whether students were predominantly working with adults or with other teenagers. The United States literature suggests that student workers work mainly with teenagers and that this does not, therefore, provide an 'authentic' workplace experience. Table 5.8 supports the literature to some extent, with paid work only half as likely to provide the experience of working mainly with adults, and more than six times as likely to involve working only with teenagers. However, only just over a quarter of those in paid work reported working for most of the time only with teenagers.

The students were also asked how much responsibility they had in their various experiences (table 5.9).

[3] It has been suggested by ECEF that the results from this sample do not reflect the national picture of participants in vocational placements, which shows a much broader spread across a range of industry areas.

Table 5.8: Amount of time spent working with adults and other teenagers, by type of workplace activity

	Spent most time working with adult workers (%)	Spent most time working with teenage workers (%)	Worked equally with adult and teenagers (%)	Total (%)
Work experience	84.8	4.1	11.1	**100.0**
Paid work	39.5	27.1	33.4	**100.0**
Work placement	74.3	6.8	18.9	**100.0**

Table 5.9: Perceived levels of responsibility, by type of workplace activity

	A lot (%)	A bit (%)	None (%)	All I was allowed to do was observe (%)	Total (%)
Work experience	26.9	61.2	7.4	4.5	**100.0**
Paid work	54.2	42.3	3.2	.3	**100.0**
Work placement	34.2	61.8	2.6	1.3	**100.0**

Clearly, paid work offered the greatest opportunities for responsibility. This could simply be related to the length of time spent in the workplace. Work placement offered more opportunity than work experience for responsibility but still below paid work. While the fact that some students were only allowed to observe during work experience is to be regretted, the percentage of 4.5 per cent is lower than some commentators have suggested. The quality of what was observed is also of some importance; one student on work experience observed a woman giving birth, which is obviously a profound and important learning experience.

Gaining access to workplace activities

It is commonly reported that a useful learning outcome of workplace activities is learning how to make contact with employers. Therefore, the students were asked who made the first contact with the employer in each of their workplace activities. Responses are shown in table 5.10.

Table 5.10: Who made the first contact with the employer?

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Vocational placement (%)
Me	66.1	69.2	30.0
My parent	15.2	13.5	3.8
A friend of my own age	1.2	3.8	0.0
An adult friend or family friend	3.5	6.0	1.3
The school	12.9	2.0	57.5
Other	1.1	5.5	7.5

The most obvious feature of this table is that vocational placements were far more likely to be arranged by the school than the other forms of workplace activity. Therefore, it appears that job-seeking skills are not particularly enhanced by doing a vocational placement; indeed, this is not generally seen as the purpose of such placements. Parents were active in a sizeable minority of cases in finding both work experience and paid work, while adult friends were also helpful for six per cent of students in the case of paid work. Students doing work experience were clearly expected to take the initiative in finding their placements; they were almost as likely as those in paid work to have made the first contact with their employer.

General findings about the nature of part-time work

Some general questions about paid work were asked in section 3 of the questionnaire. These related to how the students found out about their longest lasting paid job, why they were doing it, what the nature of their employment arrangement was, and how hard it was to fit in their schoolwork around their job.

Informal methods of job seeking were the major means of finding work (figure 5.3).

30.9 per cent found their jobs through a family member, 21.5 per cent through a friend, and 20.6 per cent approached the employer directly. Only 6.9 per cent saw the job advertised in the newspaper and 1.7 per cent on a notice board. 4.9 per cent found out about the job through the school and 13.4 per cent used 'other' means of finding out about the job.

Figure 5.3: Student workers: How they found out about the job

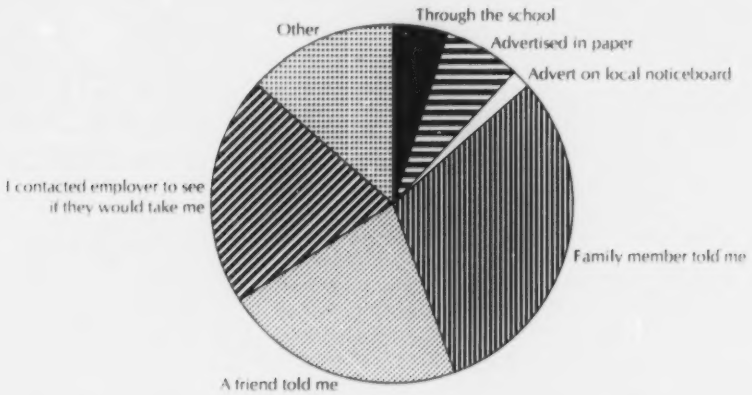

Through the school
Other
Advertised in paper
Advert on local noticeboard
I contacted employer to see if they would take me
Family member told me
A friend told me

Figure 5.4: Student workers: Most important reason for seeking part-time job

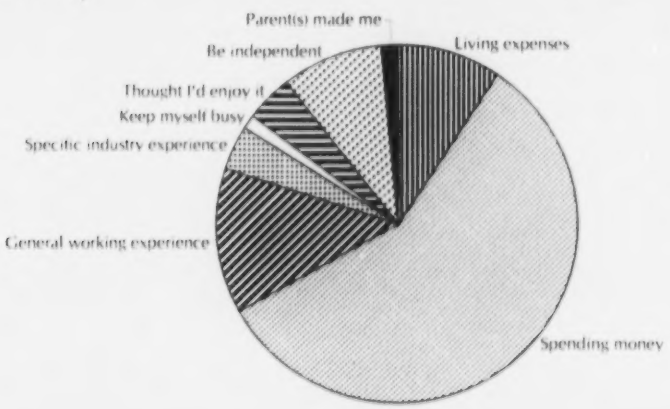
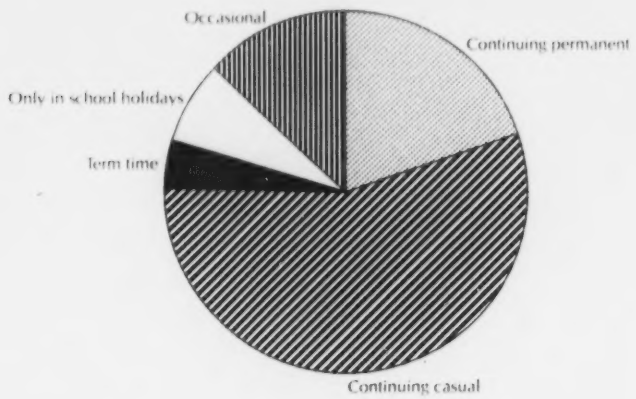


Figure 5.4 shows students' responses to a question about why they wanted their paid job. The most important reason for seeking the job was overwhelmingly to get spending money. 57.6 per cent cited this reason, 13.1 per cent citing 'general experience of work' as the most important, and nine per cent 'to be more independent'. 9.3 per cent of students worked mainly for money for living expenses, 4.2 per cent because they would enjoy it, and four per cent to get specific experience in an industry they thought they might work in later. Very small numbers took the job to keep themselves busy or because their parents had told them to.

The students in paid work were asked about the nature of their employment arrangement. These answers related to their longest lasting paid job. Figure 5.5 shows that 19.8 per cent

had permanent jobs which continued throughout school holidays and term time; 55.6 per cent were in casual jobs which continued through school holidays and term time; 7.4 per cent had jobs which were only in school holidays; 4.3 per cent were only in school term, and 13 per cent of jobs were occasional (one-off or from time to time).

Figure 5.5: Nature of employment contracts held by student workers



Because the literature suggests that working part time might affect schoolwork, the students were asked how hard they found it to fit time in for schoolwork as well as their job. Most students (62.2 per cent) said they did not find it hard, 28.4 per cent said it was quite hard, and 9.3 per cent said it was very hard (figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: Student workers' reporting on how hard it was to fit in their school work as well as their part-time jobs

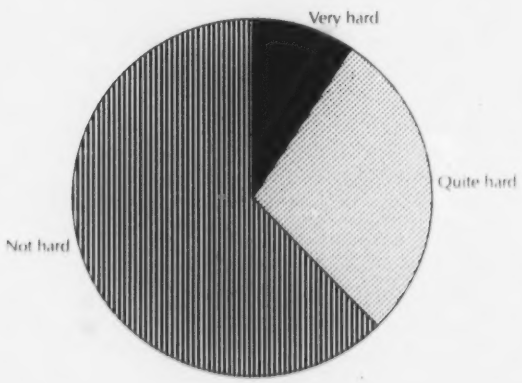


Table 5.11 analyses these results by the number of hours worked per week.

Table 5.11: Students' reporting on how hard they found it to fit in their schoolwork as well as their paid work

	Very hard		Quite hard		Not hard		Total	
1–5 hours per week	10	5.2%	37	19.4%	144	75.4%	**191**	**100.0%**
6–10 hours per week	17	7.6%	72	32.1%	135	60.3%	**224**	**100.0%**
11–15 hours per week	10	9.2%	39	35.8%	60	55.0%	**109**	**100.0%**
16–20 hours per week	17	20.5%	27	32.5%	39	47.0%	**83**	**100.0%**
21+ hours per week	7	12.1%	9	15.5%	42	72.4%	**58**	**100.0%**
Total number of students	**61**	**9.2%**	**184**	**27.7%**	**420**	**63.2%**	**665**	**100.0%**

Some interesting findings emerged. As might be expected, students working longer hours were generally finding it harder to fit in their schoolwork. However, even amongst the 83 students working 16–20 hours a week nearly a half did not find it hard at all, with only a fifth finding it very hard. It should be borne in mind that some students ascribe more importance to time spent studying than others, and there is a possibility that those choosing to work reasonably high numbers of hours might not have spent much time studying anyway. This might help to explain why a large proportion of student workers working over 21 hours a week did not find much difficulty fitting in their studies when it might be expected that they would have the greatest difficulty. Table 5.12, for Year 12 student workers only, shows that, in general, it was slightly harder for the Year 12 students to fit their schoolwork in, which might be expected as they were studying for their final school exams. However, the difference was not great, and, interestingly, almost all of the (small numbers of) Year 12 student workers working 21 hours or more said it was not hard to fit in their schoolwork.

Table 5.12: How hard was it to fit in schoolwork, Year 12 student workers only

	Very hard		Quite hard		Not hard		Total	
1–5 hours per week	3	8.1%	6	16.2%	28	75.7%	**37**	**100.0%**
6–10 hours per week	5	13.9%	11	30.6%	20	55.6%	**36**	**100.0%**
11–15 hours per week	2	13.3%	4	26.7%	9	60.0%	**15**	**100.0%**
16–20 hours per week	2	13.3%	7	46.7%	6	40.0%	**15**	**100.0%**
21+ hours per week	1	10.0%	1	10.0%	8	80.0%	**10**	**100.0%**
Numbers of students	**13**	**11.5%**	**29**	**25.7%**	**71**	**62.8%**	**113**	**100.0%**

Equity groups and access to workplace activities

This section of the chapter will discuss involvement in workplace activities analysed by gender, disability, and ethnic background. Rurality, socioeconomic background, school type and academic ability were covered in the first section of this chapter.

Table 5.13 shows comparative involvement in workplace activities for each gender, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, for NESB students and for English-speaking[39] students with an NESB parent. This table is derived from responses to section 2 of the questionnaire.

Girls were over-represented in almost every type of workplace experience apart from apprenticeships and traineeships. They were highly over-represented in 'own business', presumably because of the predominance of babysitting.

For ATSI students, access to work experience and vocational placements was around the average, but access to other types of work (except 'other paid work' not for an employer) was considerably lower than the average. This indicates the importance of school-arranged workplace activities for ATSI students and the fact that, for Aboriginal people, difficulty in accessing regular paid work may begin whilst at school.

NESB students and students with NESB parents did not show a great deal of variation from average figures except, importantly, in the area of 'other paid work for an employer' (that is, normal paid jobs) where NESB students were considerably below the average and students with NESB parents are slightly below the average. NESB students were also less likely than the average to have their own business. However, the figures for independent schools only show that NESB students at those schools were more likely than the average to have almost every mode of workplace experience. This illustrates the fact that the label 'NESB' can cover a range of nationalities and of economic circumstances, and that NESB students are by no means always disadvantaged.

Students with disabilities in general appeared to have less access to most modes of experiencing the workplace. The differences were not always statistically significant; however, there is clearly a difference in access to ordinary paid work for physically

[39] 'English-speaking' in this chapter refers to students whose main language at home was English, as opposed to 'NESB students' where the main language spoken at home was not English.

disabled students (32.3% as opposed to an average of 46.7%). Physically disabled students were more likely than the average to have been involved in work experience, vocational placements, and also in both school-based and non-school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Students with learning disabilities were nearer the average in nearly every area than students with physical disabilities. Like the ATSI students, however, numbers with disabilities were low, and, so, conclusions must be tentative.

Table 5.13: Spread of workplace experiences: All students, male/female, ATSI, NESB, NESB parent, and students with disabilities

	Male	Female	ATSI	NESB	English-speaking with NESB parent	Physical disability	Learning disability	All students
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Work experience	66.5	70.3	69.2	67.7	66.6	70.6	66.7	67.9
Vocational placement	10.3	11.0	11.5	11.8	12.0	11.8	8.3	10.5
Unpaid work: family business	22.2	25.3	15.4	25.5	25.4	8.8	16.7	23.6
Voluntary work	21.8	31.0	19.2	14.7	27.5	23.5	27.8	26.4
Other unpaid work	7.7	8.2	3.9	6.9	8.5	8.8	5.6	7.9
School-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	2.4	0.8	0.0	1.0	3.5	2.9	2.8	1.6
Non-school-based apprenticeship/ traineeship	5.9	3.3	0.0	5.9	4.2	5.9	8.3	4.4
Paid work in family business	22.2	20.5	0.0	21.6	21.1	8.8	16.7	21.2
Other paid work for an employer	46.2	47.4	38.5	36.3	43.3	35.3	41.7	46.7
Paid work in own 'business'	10.0	29.9	19.2	9.8	15.1	8.8	11.1	20.4
Other paid work	4.5	5.1	11.5	1.0	6.3	3.0	2.8	4.8

One reason for reduced access to workplace activities might be that certain minority groups do not have networks that enable easy access. The following table (table 5.14) compares 'first contact with employer' for work experience for ATSI students, NESB students, students with an NESB parent, and all students.

Table 5.14: Work experience: Who made first contact with employer? ATSI, NESB, NESB-parent students, and all students

	ATSI students	NESB students	English-speaking with NESB parent	All students
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Me	64.7	76.9	69.5	66.1
My parent	5.9	11.5	15.0	15.2
A friend of my own age	-	2.6	2.3	1.2
An adult friend or family friend	-	2.6	2.8	3.5
The school	29.4	6.4	8.5	12.9
Other	-	-	1.9	1.1

The table suggests that although ATSI students were nearly as likely as all students to contact employers themselves, they did not have access to networks of family and friends to help them find places. The school was more pro-active for these students.

However, all of the ATSI results should be treated with some caution, as the total numbers of ATSI respondents was very small (only 26). NESB students were considerably more likely than the average to rely entirely on their own resources to find their work experience places, while English-speaking students with an NESB parent showed responses very similar to the average, with a slightly lower involvement of the school than the average.

Summary

The most common form of involvement in workplaces was through work experience; it had been undertaken by around two-thirds of all students in Years 10, 11 and 12 (87.5% of Year 11 and 12 students). Paid work was the next most common form of workplace activity; 60 per cent of the students had had formal paid employment; and this reduced to 50.1 per cent when family businesses were excluded. Only 10.5 per cent of students (17.85% of Year 11 and 12 students) had done a vocational placement. While some students had had a variety of workplace experiences, nearly 15 per cent had had no formal involvement in the workplace.

Involvement in workplace activities varied with geographical location and type of school. Two major differences were that students from non-government schools were likely to have had less involvement with workplaces, and that rural students had more involvement in workplaces than urban students, especially in vocational placements.

Other factors also appeared to have some effect on the extent of activity in workplaces. Children from both below-average and above-average-income families were more likely to have had paid work than children from average-income families. Students with lower than average academic ability were more likely to engage in vocational placements and part-time apprenticeships and traineeships, than other students. There were also some variations in involvement depending on the student's intended post-school destination.

The nature of work varied between paid work, work experience and vocational placements. Major differences were:

- paid work was generally in retailing or fast foods/cafés/restaurants; vocational placements showed concentration in a limited number of industry areas, with nearly a half of these students also being in retailing or fast foods/cafés/restaurants; while work experience was much more widely diffused
- those in paid work were much more likely than those on work experience or vocational placements to be working exclusively with other teenagers; only 39.4 per cent of paid workers compared with 84.8 per cent of work experience students spent most of their time working with adult workers
- paid work offered the most chance of responsibility; over one-half of paid student workers had a lot of responsibility compared with a third of vocational placement students and a quarter of work experience students

Some differences emerged between students from different equity groups. The most significant differences were the following:

- girls were more likely to be engaged in every type of workplace activity except apprenticeships and traineeships
- NESB student and those with an NESB parent did not show much difference from the average, except in 'ordinary' paid work where NESB students were considerably below the average; however, NESB students at non-government schools were more likely than the average to be involved in workplace activities
- ATSI students were less likely than other students to be engaged in any workplace activity, except for work experience and vocational placements

- in comparison with the average, ATSI students received less help from families and friends in finding work experience places and more help from the school; while NESB students were the most likely to find their work experience places entirely by themselves
- students with physical disabilities were less likely to have had ordinary paid jobs than the average but were more likely to be involved in school-arranged activities (work experience, vocational placements and apprenticeships and traineeships)

A number of points about students' paid work emerged from the study:

- involvement in paid work increased with year level except that Year 12 students reported having had less involvement than Year 11 students, suggesting that paid work might be in the process of becoming a more common experience
- well over half of students who had worked got a paid job mainly for extra spending money; nearly a fifth wanted general or specific workplace experience and only ten per cent needed the money to help support themselves or their parents
- jobs were most often found through personal contacts—over a half found their jobs through a family member or a friend
- 55 per cent of student workers were on continuing casual contracts, nearly 20 per cent in permanent jobs, and the remainder in a variety of contract arrangements
- the average number of hours worked in the previous week (which in all cases was a school-term week) was 8.5, with 42.2 per cent of students working five hours or less; Year 12 students worked slightly shorter hours than Year 11 students
- most students (62.2%) did not find it hard to fit in their paid jobs around their schoolwork; generally, the more hours students worked, the harder they found it, but this did not apply for some students working very long hours, even in Year 12

6 Findings from the survey: Students' learning in their workplace activities

This chapter also reports on the findings from the survey, this time addressing the second of the project's research questions:

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

The chapter reports on what students learned, ways in which they learned and were trained. Comparisons are made between learning from the three major types of workplace activity, and the links between school and the workplace activities are explored.

The findings in this table are taken from sections 3, 4 and 5 of the questionnaire. In these sections, students were asked to respond for one of each applicable type of workplace activity: work experience, paid work and vocational placements.[v] They were supposed to answer for the longest lasting activity in each section. Thus they were not necessarily covering the whole range of their workplace experiences. Moreover in some cases students reported a workplace activity (in section 2 of the questionnaire) but did not go on to complete the appropriate questions in later sections.

Attitude to work

Because it is generally believed that motivation plays a large part in learning, students were asked how much they liked their workplace activities. The answers for each of the three types of activity were as follows (table 6.1).

Table 6.1: How much students enjoyed their workplace activity, by type of activity

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Vocational placement (%)
A lot	57.7	45.5	56.3
A bit	36.1	44.4	37.5
Not at all	6.2	10.1	6.3

Paid work clearly appeared to have been the least enjoyable way of experiencing the workplace, nevertheless almost 90 per cent of students liked their jobs at least 'a bit'. The percentages for work experience and vocational placement were almost identical to each other.

'Liking the job' was correlated with self-reported socioeconomic status and academic ability. The following major findings emerged:

- students from families with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to have gained no enjoyment at all from work experience but were more likely to enjoy paid work than the average
- there were no other significant findings for socioeconomic status
- students with lower academic ability were considerably less likely than the average to enjoy work experience
- these students were also slightly less likely than the average to enjoy paid work

[v] Chapter 4 explains some of the problems in the data associated with this point.

- students with above-average academic ability were more likely than the average to have gained no enjoyment at all from their vocational placements
- all below-average students enjoyed their vocational placements 'some' or 'a bit', but they were less likely to enjoy their placements a 'lot' than the average

The numbers for vocational placements were quite low, so the findings related to placements can only be tentative. The findings that a large minority of students from families with financial situations worse than average did not enjoy work experience at all (13.9% compared with 6.2% of all students) were interesting. Possible explanations for this include the possibility that such students may be less likely than the average to be able to have much control over the selection of a site for work experience, or that students might lack a working role model in their family who could prepare them for the realities of workplaces. Lack of enjoyment of work experience was even more striking for students who rated themselves as below-average ability. Possibly these students were being expected to perform tasks beyond their abilities and were not receiving any extra support from school.

What students learned

Generic skills development

A number of questions explored *what* the students learned at work. Tables 6.2 and 6.3 report on students' perceptions of their generic skills development. The list of skills used in the questionnaire was loosely based on the Mayer Key Competencies (AEC/MOVEET 1993) but included two more general 'employability skills'.

Table 6.2: 'Did you develop the following general skills in this period of work experience *or* job?'

	A lot		Some		A bit		Not at all	
	Work exp. (%)	Paid work (%)	Work exp. (%)	Paid work (%)	Work exp. (%)	Paid work (%)	Work exp. (%)	Paid work (%)
Communication/ writing	7.4	13.0	21.7	15.2	19.0	18.1	51.8	54.0
Verbal communication	43.9	63.8	31.8	20.8	18.0	9.9	6.4	5.5
Planning and organisation	22.3	34.0	35.8	35.5	25.6	20.1	16.4	10.0
Working in teams	34.3	47.5	28.8	25.8	20.9	13.4	16.0	13.0
Using your initiative	37.9	56.2	34.7	27.2	17.9	11.6	9.5	5.0
Solving problems	23.6	35.7	35.9	32.9	23.7	21.2	16.9	10.0
How to behave at work	46.9	57.5	29.0	14.3	10.3	9.7	9.7	-

Table 6.3: 'Did you develop the following general skills in this placement?'

	A lot (%)	Some (%)	A bit (%)	Not at all (%)
Communication in writing	22.5	21.1	26.8	29.6
Verbal communication	50.0	34.7	9.7	5.6
Planning and organising	30.0	42.9	12.9	14.3
Working in teams	47.9	28.8	12.3	11.0
Using your initiative	34.7	40.3	18.1	6.9
Solving problems	24.7	34.2	21.9	19.2
How to behave at work	47.2	22.2	20.8	9.7

These findings showed some interesting results, both in showing which general skills are developed in teenagers' workplace activities, and in the differences between the different types of workplace activity. To explore the findings further, a weighted scoring system was devised to allow for easier comparison. This enabled an average value to be ascribed for each general skill. In each instance, 'a lot' responses were multiplied by 3, 'some' responses by 2, and 'a bit' responses by 1. Each total was then divided by the number of students that had answered for that general skill in each of the relevant questions. The results are shown in table 6.4.

Table 6.4: General skills values for students undertaking work experience, paid work and vocational placement, by work placement

	Work experience	Paid work	Vocational placement
Communication in writing	0.9	0.9	1.4
Verbal communication	2.1	2.4	2.3
Planning and organising	1.6	1.9	1.9
Working in teams	1.8	2.1	2.1
Using your initiative	2.0	2.4	2.0
Solving problems	1.7	1.9	1.6
How to behave at work	2.1	2.3	2.1

Note: In interpreting this table, a value of less than 1 shows that, on average, students felt that the skills were developed less than 'a bit'. A value of between 1 and 2 shows that students felt that skills were developed between 'a bit' and 'some'; and a value of between 2 and 3 showed that students' skills were developed between 'some' and 'a lot'.

The results show that similar types of generic skills are developed in the three types of workplace activity, with 'behaving at work', 'verbal communication' and 'using your initiative' all scoring fairly highly, and 'written communication' scoring the lowest. Paid work and vocational placements both had verbal communication as the highest scoring generic skill, while 'how to behave at work' was equal-first for work experience. Overall, paid work appeared to be the most effective in developing generic skills, with vocational placements not far behind.

Further analysis was carried out to produce a 'generic skills' index, which, for each student, provided a value for his or her learning across all the generic skills. Thus students could potentially have a generic skills index of as high as 21 (if they answered 'a lot' for every generic skill) or as low as 0 (if they answered 'not at all' for every generic skill).

The mean generic skills index (to two decimal places) for students undertaking each type of activity was as follows:

- work experience: 12.40
- paid work: 13.98
- vocational placement: 13.87

Thus students' perceptions of development of their generic skills were that they learned most in paid work, followed very closely by vocational placements. Work experience scored a little lower.

Table 6.5: Mean generic skills index (to two decimal places) for students in work experience, paid work and vocational placements, by enjoyment of the different types of activity

Enjoyment of activity	Work experience	Paid work	Vocational placement
A lot	13.54	15.25	14.77
A bit	11.09	13.23	13.26
Not at all	8.72	11.21	6.00
Total for each type of activity	**12.40**	**13.98**	**13.87**

The generic skills index was then measured against a number of variables. Table 6.5 shows mean generic skills indices by the student's enjoyment of the workplace activity.

For each type of activity it is apparent that students' generic skills index was higher when they enjoyed their workplace activity. It is debatable, of course, whether the learning or enjoyment was the causal factor.

The generic skills index was also plotted against industry area (table 6.6). The results did not show a great deal of variation between the industry areas apart from the following:

- the building industry provided significantly higher generic skills development than the average for work experience students
- health, personal and community services provided the highest generic skills development in paid work
- newspaper delivery was not a good developer of generic skills

Table 6.6: Mean generic skills index (to two decimal places) for students in work experience, paid work and vocational placements, by industry area of the activity

Work experience by industry	Work experience	Paid work	Vocational placements
Farming, forestry, fishing, mining	12.09	11.42	No cases
Manufacturing	12.06	12.15	14.17
Building including electrical & plumbing	13.97	14.75	14.00
Retailing	12.81	14.61	12.63
Fast foods, cafés, or restaurants	12.93	14.67	13.29
Cultural, recreational or sporting	11.88	14.06	No cases
Banking/real estate/insurance	11.69	16.33	No cases
Gov't admin. including education & defence	12.35	10.50	15.50
Health, personal & community services (including child care)	11.82	15.64	16.25
Communications/media/computing	12.01	11.00	17.00
Babysitting	n/a	11.15	n/a
Newspaper delivery	n/a	10.54	n/a
Other	12.75	13.69	14.00

Notes: (i) For paid work, numbers for banking/real estate/insurance, government administration and communications/media/computing are too low to provide reliable information
(ii) For vocational placements, the numbers are too low for the information for all industry areas except manufacturing, retailing and fast foods to be reliable

For paid work only, the generic skills index was also plotted by the most important reason for taking the job. Table 6.7 shows the results.

Table 6.7: Mean generic skills index (to two decimal places) for paid student workers by reason for taking the job

Most important reason for doing the job	Mean generic skills index
I or my family needed the money for living expenses	13.52
I wanted extra spending money	13.59
I wanted general experience of work	15.10
I wanted specific experience in an industry I would like to work in later	15.85
To keep myself busy or out of the house	15.50
I thought I would enjoy it	14.28
To be more independent	14.67
My parent(s) told me to do it	11.90
Total	**13.98**

As might be expected, students who took a job because they wanted to learn (either to gain general or specific experience) were more likely than the average to develop their generic skills. Students who took work to keep themselves busy or out of the house also reported higher levels of generic skills development. The lowest generic skills development was amongst the ten students whose main reason for taking their job was because their parents told them to.

Specific skills development

Students were also asked about the 'special skills' involved in the 'jobs' they did. This gave some insight into the type of work they were doing. This was an open-ended question and responses were diverse, but some common responses were gathered together into categories during data analysis. Table 6.8 shows the findings.

Table 6.8: Special skills involved in the three types of workplace activities

	Work experience special skills (%)	Paid work special skills (%)	Structured work placement special skills (%)
Communication skills	10.5	5.4	8.9
Dealing with customers	16.7	48.8	17.8
Dealing with clients	4.5	4.7	n/a
Displaying patience	3.5	2.3	n/a
Operating a cash register	1.0	4.4	4.4
Operating a computer	18.4	5.9	15.6
Operating other equipment	6.3	4.1	11.1
Other	39.1	24.3	42.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

While the large percentage of 'other' responses means conclusions drawn from this data can only be tentative, it was evident that dealing with customers was a much larger feature of paid work than of work experience or vocational placements. Operating a computer appeared to be a common skill in vocational placements and work experience, but not in paid work. It is interesting that most of the 'special skills' could also be classified as generic skills. This has also been noted by Smith (2000) with relation to young people's full-time work. The greater proportion of 'other' specific skills for placement students might suggest that a broader range of skills were being developed in placements, particularly than in paid work where most reported skills could easily be classified under seven main headings.[9]

Students were also asked 'how well' they learned each of these special skills. These responses are given in table 6.9.

Table 6.9: How well the students learned the 'special skills' they identified as being important in their workplace activities

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Vocational placement (%)
I learned it well	37.9	65.5	64.9
I learned it a bit	29.0	12.5	13.5
I knew it already	33.0	22.0	21.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

As might be expected, because paid work was likely to last for longer, learning of skills appeared to be better in paid work. Vocational placements were also good sites of

[9] This conclusion can only be tentative as the classification into categories was subjective.

learning of specific skills. This could have been because the students had already practised skills in associated school or TAFE classes.

In further analysis, the results were plotted against enjoyment of the workplace activity, and industry area, as for the generic skills index. Table 6.10 shows the results for work experience students and paid student workers. The numbers of responses for vocational placement students were too low for analysis.

Table 6.10: Work experience students, development of special skill by enjoyment of work experience

	I learned it well		I learned it a bit		I knew it already	
Enjoyment of activity	**Work experience (%)**	**Paid work (%)**	**Work experience (%)**	**Paid work (%)**	**Work experience (%)**	**Paid work (%)**
A lot	45.0	69.4	25.3	8.1	29.7	22.5
A bit	29.8	61.5	31.4	12.6	38.8	25.9
Not at all	24.1	67.7	48.3	32.3	27.6	-
All (for each activity)	38.5	65.9	28.7	12.3	32.8	21.9

Table 6.10 suggests that learning of special skills in paid work is not affected by enjoyment of the job so much as it is in work experience. This makes sense since, in order to keep a job, student workers are obliged to master certain tasks, whereas in work experience there is no such compulsion.

Learning of special skills was also cross-tabbed against industry area for each of the three types of workplace activity. Table 6.11 summarises the major findings (any industry area with less than ten students in that activity has been excluded).

Table 6.11: Special skills learning, by industry area of workplace activity

	Industries with high special skills learning	**Industries with high incidence of 'knew it already'**	**Industries with low level of special skills learning**
Work experience	Farming, forestry, fishing and mining	Gov't. admin	Health, personal and community services
	Manufacturing	Farming etc.	
	Building	Banking, real estate and insurance	
	Retailing	Building	
Paid work	Health etc.	Farming etc.	-
	Retailing	Newspaper delivery	
	Fast food, cafés and restaurants	Cultural, recreational and sporting	
		Babysitting	
Vocational placements	-	Fast food etc.	-

Note: The only industry area with ten or more students in vocational placements who answered the 'special skills' question was fast food, cafés and restaurants

For paid work only, special skills development was plotted against reason for doing the job. The results are shown in table 6.12.

The data in this table are inconclusive. Perhaps the strongest finding is that those who were looking for specific experience in an industry they wanted to work in were most likely to know the special skill already, perhaps through a previous job or a vocational placement. Interestingly, those compelled by their parents to work appeared to learn the specific skill best.

Table 6.12: Student workers: Special skills development by reason for taking the job

	I learned it well (%)	I learned it a bit (%)	I knew it already (%)	Total (%)
I or my family needed the money for living expenses	57.9	15.8	26.3	**100.0**
I wanted extra spending money	62.7	13.5	23.8	**100.0**
I wanted general experience of work	79.1	9.3	11.6	**100.0**
I wanted specific experience in an industry re: work in later	54.5	-	45.5	**100.0**
To keep myself busy or out of the house	75.0	-	25.0	**100.0**
I thought I would enjoy it	57.1	14.3	28.6	**100.0**
To be more independent	73.5	14.7	11.8	**100.0**
My parent(s) told me to do it	83.3	-	16.7	**100.0**
Total	**213.0**	**40.0**	**71.0**	**324.0**
All	65.7	12.3	21.9	**100.0**

How students learned and were trained

The analysis now moves on from *what* the students learned to *how* they learned it. The following two tables relate to the training which students were given. In question 23 (and corresponding questions in sections 4 and 5) students were asked about their 'up-front' training. This initial training, according to the literature (Hull 1999), is reasonably well carried out in students' part-time work, at least. Of those who had participated in the relevant activities, the following percentages (table 6.13) had received up-front training of the three different types.

Table 6.13: Percentage of students undertaking each of the three forms of workplace activity who received different types of 'up-front' training

	Formal induction off the job (%)	Formal skills training off the job (%)	Formal skills training on the job (%)
Work experience	37.5	10.0	35.5
Paid work	38.7	19.3	45.2
Vocational placement	40.0	32.9	15.7

Somewhat over one-third of students received formal induction off the job (away from the workstation) in both work experience and paid work settings. However, far fewer received up-front off-the-job skills training, with most up-front skills training received on the job. Both types of up-front skills training were more common in paid jobs than in work experience. It is interesting to note that work experience students were more likely to have an induction than up-front on-the-job skills training, while the reverse was true for students in paid work. Vocational placement students showed a different training pattern, being twice as likely to receive off-the-job skills training than on-the-job skills training.

Students were also asked about how they continued to learn after their initial training (if any). Table 6.14 shows students' responses to a question about how clear they were about how to do their work; this is a proxy for their perceptions of the quality of the training they received.

This table suggests that students in paid work were more likely than those on work experience or vocational placements to be trained appropriately for specific tasks. Work experience students appeared to be the least well prepared for their tasks, with approximately the same percentage of work experience and work placement students being 'usually' unclear about their tasks, but work placement students more likely to be 'sometimes' unclear. One would expect the more favourable results for paid work to be

related partly to the length of time that students spent in the respective workplaces, and also, perhaps, to the more limited range of tasks which might be involved in paid work. Overall, though, there was not a great deal of difference between those in paid work and those on vocational placements.

Table 6.14: Quality of training received by students

	Always felt clear about how to carry out tasks (%)	Sometimes unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)	Usually unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)
Work experience	47.8	47.7	4.4
Paid work	57.1	39.5	3.1
Vocational placement	54.8	41.1	4.1

The quality of training was also analysed by industry area. The following matrix (table 6.15) shows the main results of this analysis.

Table 6.15: Industries where training of student workers was better than average and worse than average

	Better training than average	Worse training than average
Work experience	Cultural, recreation and sport	Building
	Government administration (including education and defence)	Fast food, cafés and restaurants
		Health, personal and community services
Paid work	Newspaper delivery	Government administration
	Building	Retailing
	Cultural, recreation and sport	
	Babysitting	
	Communications and media	
Vocational placements	Government administration	*No conclusive findings*
	Manufacturing	

Note: The proxy questions for 'quality of training' asked the students how clear they felt about how to carry out tasks. It is possible that those who responded that they always felt clear about how to carry out tasks were simply carrying out very easy tasks rather than being particularly well trained. This could apply to newspaper delivery, for example.

For paid workers, the quality of training was also plotted against type of employment arrangement. Table 6.16 shows the results.

Table 6.16: Student workers: Quality of training, by employment arrangement

	I always felt clear about how to carry out tasks (%)	Sometimes I was unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)	I was usually unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)
Continuing permanent	62.0	35.5	2.5
Continuing casual	55.1	40.8	4.1
Term time only	50.0	50.0	-
Only in school holidays	66.7	31.4	2.0
Occasional or one-off	51.7	46.0	2.3
All	56.7	40.1	3.3

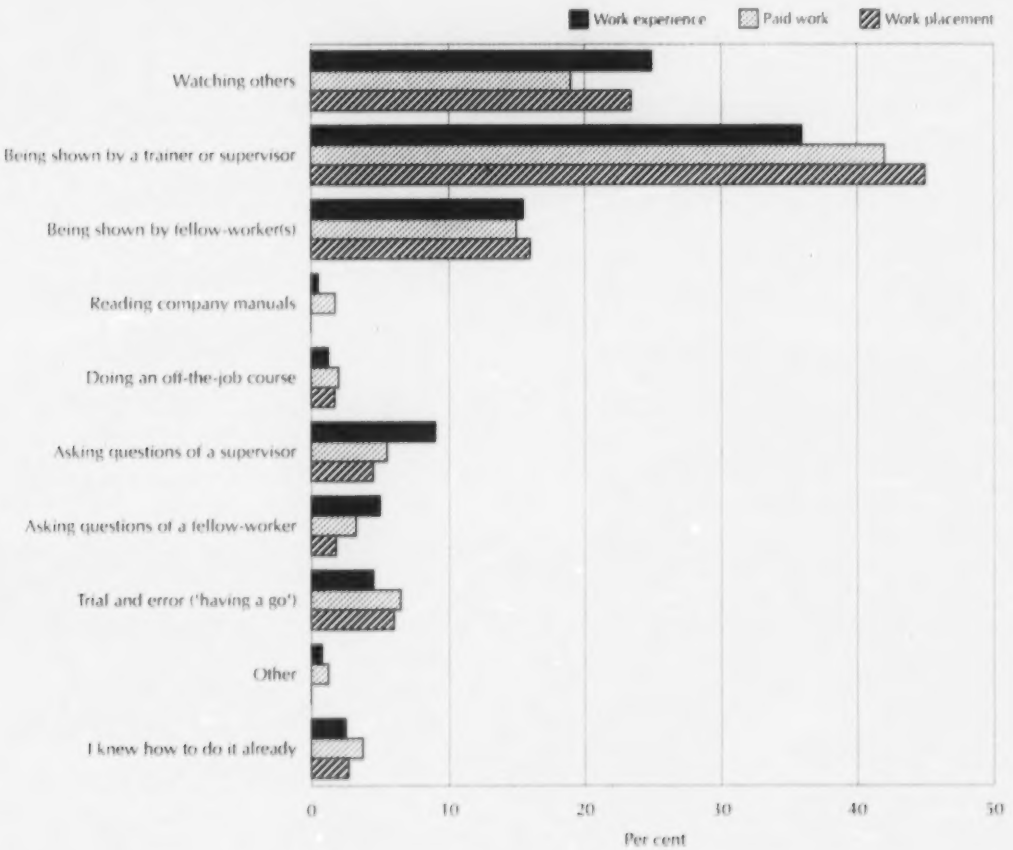
Clearly, permanent student workers were better trained than casual workers. School-holiday workers also appeared to be well trained or perhaps to be undertaking simpler tasks.

It is well known that people at work do not only learn from being trained. Question 24 (and corresponding questions in sections 4 and 5 of the questionnaire) gave students a number of ways in which people learn at work and asked them to choose and rank the three most important for them in the job or experience which they were discussing, and rank them in order of importance. Table 6.17 and figure 6.1 show the responses for the first most important only.

Table 6.17: Most important way in which students learned in their workplace activities (first most important way only)

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Work placement (%)
Watching others	25.1	19.0	23.4
Being shown by a trainer or supervisor	35.9	41.8	44.9
Being shown by fellow workers	15.2	14.9	15.9
Reading company manuals	0.5	1.7	-
Doing an off-the-job course	1.3	1.9	1.4
Asking questions of a supervisor	9.2	5.6	4.3
Asking questions of a fellow worker	4.9	3.6	1.4
Trial and error ('having a go')	4.5	6.4	5.8
Other	0.7	1.2	-
I knew how to do it already	2.7	3.9	2.9

Figure 6.1: Most important way in which students learned in their workplace activities (first most important way only)



Watching others, being shown by a trainer or supervisor, and being shown by fellow worker(s) were the three most important forms of learning in all types of workplace activity. The main difference between the groups was that asking questions of a supervisor was the main method of learning for almost one-tenth of work experience students—almost twice the proportion of vocational placement students or paid student workers.

A weighted index was prepared to consolidate the methods of learning which students placed first, second and third in each type of workplace activity. This index, gained by weighting the first, second and third responses to the appropriate question and dividing by the number of students who answered that question, enabled direct comparisons to be made between the types of workplace activity and to take into account second- and third-ranked learning methods as well as the first most important. Table 6.18 shows the results of this calculation, ranked in order of their use by work experience students.

Table 6.18: Three most important methods of learning in the workplace: Weighted index

	Work experience (%)	Paid work (%)	Vocational placement (%)
Being shown by a supervisor	1.8	1.1	1.8
Watching others	1.4	1.2	1.2
Being shown by a fellow employee	1.0	1.0	1.1
Asking questions of a supervisor	0.8	0.6	0.8
Asking questions of a fellow worker	0.5	0.5	0.4
Trial and error	0.5	0.5	0.2
Other	0.4	0.6	0.2
I knew how to do it already	0.2	0.2	0.1
Reading a manual	0.1	0.1	0.1
Doing an off-the-job course	0.1	0.1	0.1

These results indicate that even when the first three methods of learning are taken into account—instead of just the first—there are still few significant differences between the three types of workplace activity. The most obvious difference was that vocational placement and work experience students received far more instruction from a supervisor than those in paid work.

Comparing learning from the different workplace activities

Many of the questions in the survey enabled comparisons to be made, during data analysis, between the learning involved in the three types of workplace experiences. In addition, there were some questions which asked students explicitly to make some comparisons between what they learned in the different types of experiences.

Those students who had paid jobs as well as work experience were asked from which type of experience they learned most. 65.6 per cent said they learned more from their paid work, although 76.4 per cent of these attributed this mainly to the length of employment. However, 68.4 per cent said that work experience was still useful despite the fact that they had paid work as well.

Students were asked how much they had learned from work experience that they had not learned from their paid job(s), and vice versa. Table 6.19 shows the results of these questions.

Those who had done all three types of workplace activity—paid work, vocational placement and work experience—were also asked to compare the amount they learned from each activity. 44.1 per cent said they learned most from paid work, 28.8 per cent from their vocational placements, and 27.1 per cent from work experience. However, when the first, second and third rankings for each student were weighted and totalled,

there was very little difference between the three types of workplace activity. This was because many students had put paid work third and a large number had put vocational placements second, with the result that vocational placements came out slightly ahead in the weighted totals. Of the students who put paid work first, 71 per cent attributed it to the length of time spent in paid work.

The students who had done all three types of activity were asked whether the vocational placement was useful considering that they had also had paid work. 61.2 per cent considered that it was still useful. Interestingly, this is somewhat less than the 68.4 per cent who had had paid jobs who considered work experience useful. One explanation for this could be that some students were doing vocational placements in the same industry area as they were already working part-time and, hence, were not learning much new from their vocational placement. This explanation is somewhat supported by the data, which showed that of those students who had done both vocational placements and paid work (there were 44 of these students altogether), 27.7 per cent had placements in the same industry as their paid jobs.

Table 6.19: Work experience and paid work: How much students learned from one that they did not learn from the other

	Learned from paid job(s) that did not learn from work experience (%)	Learned from work experience that did not learn from paid job(s) (%)
A lot	33.1	23.7
Some	23.6	24.6
A bit	15.7	20.1
Nothing	27.7	31.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Transfer of learning and links between school and work

A number of questions related to links between school and workplace activities. Work experience and vocational placement students were asked about contact maintained by the school while they were in the workplace (tables 6.20 and 6.21).

Tables 6.20 and 6.21: Contact with school during work experience and vocational placement

Work experience	No. of responses	% of the students with work experience
A schoolteacher visited me once only	517	51.3
A schoolteacher visited me more than once	41	4.1
A schoolteacher phoned me	197	19.5
I had a workbook from school which I had to fill in	404	40.1
Total	**1159**	

Vocational placement	No. of responses	% of the students with vocational placement
A schoolteacher visited me once only	46	65.7
A schoolteacher visited me more than once	9	12.9
A schoolteacher phoned me	14	20.0
I had a workbook from school which I had to fill in	38	54.3
Total	**107**	

Tables 6.20 and 6.21 indicate that links between school and the workplace were stronger in vocational placements than in work experience. Each indicator of contact between school and the workplace was stronger for vocational placement students.

Although assessment of learning was not a feature of the project, one question about assessment was included. The same students as in tables 6.20 and 6.21 were asked about whether assessment was carried out by a workplace supervisor and/or a schoolteacher. Table 6.22 shows the results.

Table 6.22: Formal (written) assessment of work experience and vocational placements

	Work experience (%)	Vocational placement (%)
A supervisor /workplace trainer wrote a written report on my performance	83.8	84.3
A schoolteacher wrote a written report on my performance	14.9	12.9
Other	*Choice not available*	12.9

It is interesting to note that there appeared to be little difference in the extent to which formal (written) assessment took place in vocational placements as compared to work experience. It is possible, however, that competency-based checklists might have been utilised in vocational placements, but the students did not perceive these as being 'written reports'.

Students were also asked whether they discussed their workplace activities at school, either in class time or informally with friends. The following responses (table 6.23) were obtained.

Table 6.23: Extent of 'processing' of workplace activities back at school

	Often (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never (%)	Total (%)
Work experience learning—discussed in class time	7.7	49.8	42.5	**100.0**
Work experience learning—discussed with friends	13.9	68.8	17.3	**100.0**
Paid work learning—discussed in class time	5.8	25.4	68.8	**100.0**
Paid work learning—discussed with friends	16.7	56.7	26.6	**100.0**
Vocational placement learning—discussed in class time	20.9	52.2	26.9	**100.0**
Vocational placement learning—discussed with friends	21.5	55.4	23.1	**100.0**

As might be expected, since vocational placements were connected with a school course, placement experiences were more discussed in class time than work experience or paid work. Paid work was the least likely to be discussed in class time, with over two-thirds of respondents saying that they never talked about their work in class and over a quarter never discussing their work with friends.

Vocational placement students were also asked explicitly about links between their placement and the related course. They were asked how much the course had helped in their placement and vice versa. Table 6.24 shows the findings, which show close linkages between the two, but a clear indication that the schoolwork helped with the workplace experience more than vice versa.

Students were asked how much their workplace activities had helped them at school more generally (as opposed to specific courses for the placement students) (table 6.25).

Table 6.24: Vocational placements: Links between the placement and the related course

	How much did the course help in your placement? (%)	How much did the placement help in your course? (%)
A lot	46.5	25.4
Some	26.8	35.2
A bit	16.9	11.3
Not at all	9.9	28.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 6.25: How much workplace activities have helped students at school generally

	How much has work experience helped you at school? (%)	How much has your paid job helped you at school? (%)	How much has your vocational placement helped you at school more generally? (%)
A lot	9.8	5.9	10.0
Some	21.3	19.4	32.9
A bit	28.6	22.4	22.9
Not at all	40.3	52.3	34.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 6.25 shows that paid work appeared to be the least help in schoolwork. This could relate to the lack of 'processing' of paid work back in school. However, even with paid work, a quarter of students said that their paid jobs had helped them 'a lot' or 'some' at school. Vocational placements gave the most favourable results, with 42.9 per cent saying their placement had helped them 'a lot' or 'some' compared with 31.1 per cent for work experience.

The responses 'I knew it already' from the question about 'special skills' enabled some conclusions to be drawn about transfer of learning, as students were then asked to say where they had already learned the special skill they had mentioned. Table 6.26 shows where the students had learned the skill that they said they 'knew already'.

Table 6.26: Site of learning of the special skill which students said they knew already

	Students in work experience: Knew it already from ... (%)	Students in paid work: Knew it already from ... (%)	Students in vocational placements: Knew it already from ... (%)
School	28.9	22.2	34.5
A(nother) paid job	19.8	14.6	10.3
Work experience	n/a	9.6	20.7
Voluntary work	6.1	5.6	6.9
Home	28.9	33.3	17.2
Other	16.3	14.6	10.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

This table suggests that there was quite a considerable amount of transfer of learning from school to both paid work and work experience. There was more transfer of learning from home to paid work than to work experience, possibly suggesting that paid work might involve more mundane tasks such as cleaning than work experience did. Students in vocational placements exhibited a high rate of transfer of learning from school and also quite a high rate of transfer from work experience. However, only 29 placement students answered this question.

'Counting' learning from paid work for school results

Students were asked if they were counting their paid work towards HSC (New South Wales) or SACE (South Australia) results. If they were not counting it, they were asked if they would like to. Results for Years 11 and 12 only were analysed, as it was judged that those below Year 11 might not have a very clear idea about what might be involved.

19.8 per cent of New South Wales students and 11.6 per cent of South Australian students[2] reported that they were counting their paid work towards their HSC or SACE, with the average across both States being 13.1 per cent.

Analysis by other variables revealed the following:

- those heading for apprenticeships (41.7%) and traineeships (36.4%) were much more likely than the average (13.1%) to be counting the learning from their paid jobs; those heading for other paid work were also more likely (20%) to be counting their learning
- just over half the proportion (7.7%) of university-bound students were counting their paid-job learning compared with the average (13.1%); being TAFE bound did not affect the outcome
- rural students were more likely than urban students to be counting their paid-job learning
- ATSI students were much more likely than the average to be counting paid-job learning (over 70% of them were counting it, but the numbers involved were too small to draw firm conclusions)
- NESB students and, to a lesser extent, those with an NESB parent were slightly more likely than the average to be counting their learning
- family finances did not appear to affect whether learning was counted
- academic ability had a notable effect, with below average students more likely to be counting their learning
- by industry area, those working in building were above average in counting learning
- students who enjoyed their job were more likely to count their learning than those who did not

Those students who were not counting the learning from their paid jobs towards their HSC or SACE were asked if they would like to. 357 students answered this question. Table 6.27 shows the results by State.

Table 6.27: Would you like to count the learning from their paid jobs towards your HSC or SACE (only answered by students who were not counting learning from their paid jobs)

	New South Wales (%)	South Australia (%)	All (%)
Yes	9.1	19.3	17.1
No	59.7	46.4	49.3
Maybe	31.2	34.3	33.6

While almost one-half of students had no interest in making their paid-job learning 'count', one-third had some interest in having it count, and 17.1 per cent definitely would have liked it to count. New South Wales students appeared less keen than South Australian students.

When analysed by other variables the following emerged:

- by school-leaving destinations, the greatest interest was among those hoping to take up apprenticeships and traineeships and 'other' destinations, while the lowest interest was among those hoping to study full time at TAFE

[2] It should be noted than only 96 New South Wales and 319 South Australian students answered this question.

- rural students were less interested than urban students in having paid-job learning count
- ATSI students were more interested than the average (again, numbers were very small)
- NESB students and, to a lesser extent, those with an NESB parent were more interested than the average in having their paid-job learning count
- students from families with below-average finances were more likely to want the learning to count
- less academically able students were more likely to want the learning to count
- students working in fast food were considerably more interested than the average in having their learning count (25.2% wanted it to count, and the numbers involved were quite high, with 28 answering 'yes')
- those who enjoyed their jobs 'a bit' were more likely than those who enjoyed it 'a lot' to want their learning to count

Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships

In view of the push by the Commonwealth Government and State Governments towards enrolment of school students in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships, two tests were carried out to compare learning and training for students in such programs, compared with all students in paid work and in vocational placements. It needs to be remembered that only a small number of students completing the survey were in such arrangements and that a greater number were in privately arranged apprenticeships and traineeships than in school-based arrangements. Moreover not all of these students answered the appropriate training and learning questions.

The 'quality of training' question produced the following results (table 6.28).

Table 6.28: Quality of training received by students: Students in apprenticeships and traineeships, paid work and vocational placements

	Always felt clear about how to carry out tasks (%)	Sometimes unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)	Usually unclear about how to carry out tasks (%)
School-based apprentices and trainees	63.6	36.4	-
Non-school-based apprentices and trainees	52.9	47.1	-
All paid student workers	57.1	39.5	3.1
Vocational placement students	54.8	41.1	4.1

Although the numbers of apprentices and trainees completing this question were small (11 school based and 17 non-school based), there is some indication that school-based trainees and apprentices were better trained than non-school-based apprentices and trainees. The latter did not compare favourably either with all paid student workers or with vocational placement students.

The generic skills index was calculated for students in part-time apprenticeships and traineeships and compared with those in vocational placements and any paid job as being the most similar types of workplace experiences (table 6.29).

On this indicator, too, school-based apprentices and trainees showed greater learning than the average paid student worker or with vocational placement students. Non-school-based apprentices' and trainees' results were also favourable compared with the other groups.

Table 6.29: Mean generic skills index: Part-time apprentices and trainees compared with all paid student workers and vocational placement students

	School-based apprentices and trainees (%)	Non-school-based apprentices and trainees (%)	All paid student workers (%)	Vocational placement students (%)
Mean generic skills index	18.33	14.50	13.98	13.80

Summary

This chapter has revealed some significant findings about what students learn in workplaces. Findings relate to what students learn, how they learn and are trained, and how the different types of activities compare.

The three generic skills best developed in workplaces were as follows:

- verbal communication
- how to behave at work
- using your initiative

Written communication was the least well developed. There were some variations between the types of workplace activity, with paid work generally most effective at developing generic skills. Generic skill development was highest where students enjoyed their workplace activity, and, for paid work, where students had taken the job in order to gain experience.

The main specific skills developed in all three cases were:

- dealing with customers
- communication skills
- operating computer or other equipment

There were significant differences between paid work and the other activities, with paid work much more likely to develop customer service skills and much less likely to involve developing computer skills. There was some evidence that vocational placements developed a wider range of skills than paid work.

Formal training was not always a feature of workplace activities. Around 40 per cent of students in each type of workplace activity received formal off-the-job inductions. Nearly one-half of paid student workers received formal skills training on the job, while skill training was less common in work experience and vocational placements. Paid workers and those on vocational placements reported feeling clearer about how to do their jobs than work experience students. There were some differences between industries in the quality of training provided, and permanent workers appeared to be better trained than casual workers.

When asked about their major methods of learning in workplaces, being shown by a trainer or supervisor or fellow worker were the learning methods most often mentioned. For around a quarter of work experience and vocational placement students, watching others was the main method of learning.

When asked explicitly to compare what they learned from the different types of workplace activity, around two-thirds of students said they learned most from paid work. In three-quarters of cases this was mainly owing to length of employment. However, two-thirds of students also said that work experience was still useful even though they had had paid jobs.

Links between school and work were more common in vocational placements than work experience. There was little discussion of either work experience or paid work in class time, with nearly 70 per cent of all paid student workers saying they never discussed their

jobs in class time, and a quarter never even discussing their jobs with friends. However, over a half of students in paid work thought that their jobs had helped them at school, although work experience and vocational placements were felt to be more useful. Students reported quite a high amount of transfer of learning between their different learning environments.

Around 13 per cent of students were counting learning from their paid jobs towards their senior school certificates. Of those who were not counting their learning, only 17 per cent said they would definitely like to count it. Certain groups of students were more likely to be counting their learning, and keener to count it where they were not already.

School-based part-time apprentices and trainees were much more likely to be better trained, and to develop their generic skills, than other paid student workers (including non-school-based apprentices and trainees) or vocational placement students. However, the small numbers of school-based apprentices and trainees in the sample mean these results should be treated with caution.

7 Findings from school case studies and employer interviews

Introduction

In addition to the survey, five case studies were carried out in schools in New South Wales and South Australia, and four groups[13] of employers[14] were interviewed. The case studies involved interviews and focus groups with teachers involved in students' workplace activities and students in Years 10 to 12. Case studies were all in public schools because of the under-representation of public schools in the survey data. Because it was difficult to access Year 12 students during the course of the case studies (since they were carried out in the second-half of the academic year when Year 12 students were preparing for final school examinations), a special focus group of Year 12 students was also convened. A particular effort was made to incorporate discussion of vocational placements in this qualitative phase of the research, since the survey had produced only a limited response from students undertaking placements.

The sites for the qualitative research were as follows:

Table 7.1: Sites for case studies and interviews

Type of research	Location	State	Rural/metropolitan
School case study	'Maidstone Boys'	NSW	Metropolitan
School case study	'Treedera'	NSW	Rural
School case study	Murray Bridge	SA	Rural
School case study	'Plains Central'	NSW	Remote
School case study	Le Fevre	SA	Metropolitan
Employer focus group	Adelaide	SA	Metropolitan
Employer interviews	Sydney	NSW	Metropolitan
Employer focus group	'Plains'	NSW	Remote
Employer interviews	'Treedera'	NSW	Rural
Year 12 student focus group	Wagga Wagga	NSW	Rural

Note: Pseudonyms are used for NSW schools and employer groups.

In this chapter, the research questions are used as headings under which to present the findings from the case studies and employer focus groups and interviews. The individual case study and employer reports are presented in appendices 4 and 5, respectively.

What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

The school case studies indicated that most school students in Years 10 to 12 had a considerable amount of workplace activity. Work experience was almost universal in the schools in the case study. Vocational placements were, of course, only undertaken by

[13] In Adelaide and Plains, employers were gathered into focus groups; because of logistical difficulties, in Sydney and Treedera, employers were interviewed separately rather than as a group.
[14] The Adelaide employer focus group also included three participants from organisations which delivered or co-ordinated training.

students who had selected VET courses. Paid work was less universal, generally: schools estimated that around half of students of working age had jobs. Teachers pointed out that these jobs might include babysitting and seasonal work as well as formal work. The proportion of student-focus-group participants who were engaged in paid work varied considerably; at Canterbury it was less than half, whereas at Le Fevre it was 100 per cent. As might be expected, however, this variation was partly owing to year level. The Year 12 group had all had part-time jobs either currently or earlier in their school career. They reported that at least half of the Year 12 students they knew had paid part-time jobs.

Although teachers felt that generally work experience and paid work tended to be in different industry areas, the student focus groups indicated that it was, in fact, quite common for students to carry out paid work and work experience in the same workplace. Occasionally the same workplace would even be utilised for vocational placements, too. Sometimes work experience led to the offer of a paid job in that workplace, but also sometimes paid work led to the student selecting that workplace for work experience—perhaps because of ease of access. Teachers were conscious of the need for students to experience a variety of workplaces. In hospitality vocational placements, for example, teachers took care to place students in different areas of the industry rather than the cafés and coffee shops where they might already have paid work.

Work experience

In New South Wales, all students were expected to undertake a general period of work experience in Year 10 (Treedera offered two separate blocks), whereas in South Australia some schools did not have work experience programs until Year 11. Some South Australia schools offered additional work experience as part of a work education subject; this subject involved extensive preparation for work experience. Work experience was generally for one week, although it could be longer. Schools might assist in finding work experience places, although many schools, including Canterbury and the South Australian schools, mentioned that they preferred students to find places themselves if they could. Students from the Year 12 group reported that they were encouraged to use their family and friend networks to locate and secure work experience places.

Vocational placements

Students undertaking vocational placements were enrolled in VET courses and were generally viewed as those who were not university bound. Courses were in a relatively limited number of industry areas. For instance, at Canterbury Boys, retailing and furnishings were available, with information technology (IT) and hospitality to become available in 2001. Le Fevre offered engineering, business administration, IT and hospitality. The range of courses was not consistent between schools. Schools' offerings obviously related to the nature of local industry and also seemed to depend, to some extent, on teachers' local contacts. Schools appeared to find less difficulty placing students in vocational placements than work experience because there were fewer numbers involved. The numbers of students in some courses, such as IT, made it difficult to find suitable vocational placements in Wagga Wagga and other rural areas because there were not enough workplaces with sufficient technical infrastructure. To address this, schools (but not students' home schools) were sometimes used for vocational placements. Most students (except at Treedera High) reported that they had less choice in where they went for vocational placements than where they went for work experience. This may have simply been because they were restricted to the industry area of their VET course, but it seemed to be more than just that.

Other programs

In New South Wales a program called Work Studies was available, quite frequently targeting 'at risk' students. Work Studies did not count towards the HSC, so students who participated in this were likely to be more vocationally than academically oriented. The work placement opportunities afforded by Work Studies meant that students could either have extra placement time in their other VET subject(s) or, alternatively, experience other

work options to clarify their career direction. Work Studies students had individual programs and some attended workplaces every week; such programs caused timetabling difficulties. At Plains Central, a remote school, the school placed a high priority on helping students into work, and extra periods in workplaces were available for all students, which were not, strictly speaking, either 'work experience' or 'vocational placements'. There were instances of special individual programs for students at risk, or with special needs. These periods typically took place in larger towns, or metropolitan areas, and were negotiated following extensive career counselling sessions. Students built up portfolios based on these periods of workplace activity.

Paid work

Involvement in paid work varied considerably in extent and nature. One teacher reported that a student at his school had saved over $19 000 from his part-time work in a fast-food restaurant. A student in another school was working around 30 hours a week. Other students only worked on an occasional basis. Students in the Year 12 group mentioned that they had been in on-call and 'rostered casual' positions, which appeared to be a common pattern in fast-food outlets. In many cases, students were working for longer hours than teachers believed, and sometimes long hours made it difficult for them to fit in their schoolwork. Sometimes families relied upon students' income to help support the family. This was mentioned at Le Fevre in relation to some Aboriginal families.

Students' reasons for non-participation in paid work were varied. Reasons expressed by students or by teachers included:

- parents were opposed
- wished to focus upon study
- travel difficulties
- no jobs available locally
- sporting activities
- income from Youth Allowance meant there was no need to work
- available jobs were not in areas of career interest
- lack of confidence

Opportunities for work were generally believed to be more limited in rural areas than in metropolitan areas, although the case studies did not altogether bear this out. There was some evidence, however, that the rural students had to try harder to secure their jobs. The Year 12 students, who were all from in and around the rural city of Wagga Wagga, cited transport in rural areas as being a key factor influencing paid work, and the costs of petrol, as well as the availability of jobs in smaller towns, were key factors in being able to find work. Those who had found jobs in the immediate rural area were seen as being very fortunate, persistent, or as having good contacts. One student from the group reported working for extremely low wages in order to work locally, and she had seen a series of other students work in the same place for brief periods because of the poor conditions and very low pay.

While many students worked in 'traditional' part-time work industries, such as retailing or fast food, among the focus group participants there were several more unusual industry areas, including night-club singing, farm work, adventure park attending, and sports coaching, as well as trade areas such as hairdressing, butchery and carpentry.

In some cases, part-time work was allowed to count towards vocational placement hours in VET courses so long as there was structured training and assessment carried out by qualified assessors.

Employers' views

Many of the employers in the focus groups and interviews had well-developed programs for work experience and vocational placements, and took large numbers of students each

year.[5] These employers obviously spent a great deal of time in liaising with schools and local placement co-ordinators, and in organising programs for students. One employer commented that block periods for vocational placements would enable her to fit in more work experience students in the year, as students on one-day-a-week placements meant those weeks were not available for work experience. She was clearly intent on being as accommodating as possible to students wishing to experience workplaces. In general, the employers displayed great willingness to help young people and their schools and derived satisfaction, in most cases more satisfaction, from vocational placements than from work experience. As one employer put it: 'Work placements give you satisfaction as you see the students developing and growing in confidence over the period of their placement'.

Some employers hosted TAFE or university-placement students as well.

Employers had some comments and criticisms relating to the way in which work experience and vocational placements were organised by the schools. They wanted school students to be better prepared, and generally felt that the presence of a third party (for instance a Compact co-ordinator in New South Wales) assisted students in their preparation and enabled better matching of students to placements. In the special case of the remote town of Plains, the employers appeared to feel that there was too much emphasis on sending students out of the town for work experience. The local employers felt neglected. This belief appeared to be linked to a more general dislike of young people moving out of the community.

Several of the employers also employed part-time student workers but did not appear to see much link between this and other programs with school students. In some cases, for example Checkout Ltd in Adelaide, the student workers formed a large proportion of their regular workforce. Several employers who had work experience or placement students did not use student workers because of the nature of their industry, legal restrictions (such as service of alcohol) or a pattern of a full-time rather than part-time workforce. This observation bears out teachers' belief that work experience, in particular, is available in industries where part-time work for teenagers is not available. A few of the employers mentioned difficulty in finding suitable part-time student workers with appropriate working attitudes, but this was not a general belief.

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from workplace experiences?

What students learned

Generally it was felt that work experience provided an opportunity to learn 'the basics' about work—communication skills (with customers, managers and fellow workers), how to behave at work, punctuality and so on. Teachers and students agreed on this. They also agreed that it was an opportunity to 'try out' careers particularly in industry areas where part-time work for teenagers was not available, and that if students learned that they did not like a career area then that was a valid learning point. The Hillston students, because they left their home area for work experience, learned a number of extra 'life skills' such as negotiating public transport systems and learning about city life. Improved self-esteem among students after work experience was a common point mentioned by students and teachers alike. As well as basic work habits, students also learned a variety of special skills, which obviously varied widely.

Work experience was seen as valuable even though students had other opportunities for workplace activity. Teachers were more likely to take this view than students. Teachers appeared to feel that there was a move afoot to abandon work experience and they were opposed to this perceived policy direction.

Vocational placements were generally felt to offer more specific learning opportunities, partly because they were more focussed and partly because students were allowed to

[5] It should be noted that in many (but not all) cases, the employers who took part in the research had been recommended to the researchers by schools or education departments and, hence, may have been examples of 'good practice' host employers.

undertake more activities. For example, retail students might be allowed to operate a cash register on a vocational placement but not during work experience. Although students might not learn any new skills on vocational placements—having learned them in school beforehand—they were able to contextualise what they had learned. They might also get the chance to use different equipment (for example, in the catering area) from that available in school facilities. One teacher mentioned that he was not sure that all employers understood the difference between work experience and vocational placements. One of the student focus groups offered the opinion that the best way to be introduced to the world of work was to do work experience, followed by a vocational placement and, finally, paid part-time work.*

In both work experience and vocational placements the rural students were perceived to be at some disadvantage in learning opportunities. This was because local businesses might be small or not technologically advanced. Also, in a limited pool of host employers, a local TAFE college might take the cream of local host employers.

How students learned

Students most often reported learning through being shown by 'the boss'—a manager or supervisor—and by watching other workers. Watching another worker perform a task while the worker explained it was felt to be a useful learning strategy by students. A major advantage of workplace learning, as opposed to school learning, was that it was generally one-to-one. One student noted that a worker could give her his or her full attention and make sure she understood something, whereas at school a teacher had to deal with other students simultaneously. Quite often they learned by teaching themselves. Other learning strategies included trying jobs in different sections, reading company manuals, using a checklist, formal training sessions and teaching oneself. Employers noted that students asked questions, observed other workers, and modelled themselves on existing workers.

It was often stated that learning in the workplace was different from learning at school, and many students appeared to prefer being in the workplace to being at school. Not all did, however; Murray Bridge students felt their school studies were just as effective in preparing them for working life. Those students who preferred workplace learning sometimes reported increased motivation in schoolwork after periods in the workplace. This was variously because they began to have a clearer idea of what they wanted to do and how school could help them reach their goals, or because they learned that workplaces were hostile environments compared with school and, thus, appreciated school more.

Inhibitors of learning

A number of inhibitors of learning were identified by the different participants. These related primarily to work experience and vocational placements rather than paid work, and included:

- being given mundane or 'scabby' jobs—employers using an 'apprentice model'—in this case, one teacher said, students may return to the workplace after the first day. Work experience was felt to be more prone to this type of practice than vocational placements
- work experience students not being given specific learning objectives: they might just 'float around' if they were not assertive. Placement students were easier to pin down
- supervisors not being good at explaining things
- students being unwilling to ask questions for fear of appearing 'dorky'. Some students felt their employers encouraged questioning and some felt that it was discouraged. The Year 12 group saw this as very different from the school culture, where, they thought, questions were actively encouraged

* This view may have simply been because this was the pattern which had been followed by the group members.

- the workplace being too busy for anyone to pay much attention to the student
- limits in the types of tasks which could be done by the student
- some junior staff being unwilling to train students, although managers were keen
- shift working, which made it more difficult to place students with good staff and also to accommodate the number of hours which students were supposed to work
- students who were not really committed to their work experience (lack of motivation meant not much learning took place)
- having more than one student in one workplace or department; this could hamper learning as it did not encourage relating to permanent staff
- lack of debriefing after work experience/placement

Facilitators of learning

Again relating mainly to unpaid work, the following factors were put forward as facilitators of learning:

- schools preparing students for the crises that might arise in workplaces
- a clear list of competencies to be developed (for work experience students as well as vocational-placement students, as evidenced at Treedera)
- students having clear personal goals for their period in the workplace
- student having sufficient initial skills to be able to perform useful work; for example computer skills
- students being keen to learn, such students received much greater attention from staff and learned more than those who were not. Two comments included:
  Training tends to be consistent with their attitude and the progress they are making.
  Some (placement) students are like sponges. They soak up all the energy from our workers.
- ownership by the employers of the program (this tended to be more common in the rural case studies)
- peer education before entering the workplace
- off-the-job training in use of equipment before entering the workplace
- enthusiasm of school, especially the Principal, VET and careers staff
- commitment of staff in the workplace

Links between school and workplace activities

There was much variation in the nature of linkages between school and workplace activities. The employers were very conscious of these differences and were not happy with schools who did not appear to cherish the students who were out in industry or the host employers. Work experience had fewer links with the formal school curriculum than did vocational placements. This did not mean no linkages were made or no use made of the experience. At Canterbury, for example, work experience was referred to in other classes, along with other activities undertaken by students in their out-of-school lives. So, for example, photography students produced a display of photographs of students on work experience. At Murray Bridge, there was always some reflective writing after each period of work experience or vocational placement. VET teachers at Treedera would have liked more links between VET subjects and the formal curriculum; for example, Maths classes could use examples from vocational areas.

In general, the students would have liked more preparation before work experience but were not overly concerned about lack of preparation. Employers, on the other hand, were most concerned that some students were inadequately prepared. Preparation for vocational placements appeared to be more intensive. Schools were more conscious than employers of the lack of curriculum time for preparation. The Principal of Hillston mentioned that in the context of a general education they would not wish to increase the time spent on preparation for work experience (which was, in fact, quite extensive).

Some students made more general comments about links between school and work not necessarily relating to their current workplace activities. A Year 12 boy echoed the thoughts of a number of students who felt the worlds of school and work had very little in common.

School doesn't teach you anything about work.

The Year 12 group was also very critical of the career advice offered through school. A surprising number of the group had little idea of what their next step would be, despite the fact that they had completed their schooling.

Recognition of learning from paid work

Most students appeared not to have thought about this issue before it was raised in the focus groups. Once the issue was raised, several students expressed a keenness for their paid work to count for their school studies. This wish appeared to be related partly to efficiency in management of their limited time in Years 11 and 12, and partly to having their practical (as opposed to academic) skills recognised. At Treedera, students had some interesting comments about the difficulties they saw arising in such a process. One student, for example, suggested that an employer might 'tick off' competencies merely because he or she liked someone, or that the employer may not be qualified to assess performance. The group also felt that employers and school staff alike might find the process too burdensome.

Employers

Most of the employers interviewed had a genuine interest in the development of young people and in assisting the transition from school to full-time work. Although employers appeared to be concerned that work experience and vocational-placement students underwent effective learning whilst in their workplaces, they did not appear concerned with the development of paid student workers in the same way. However, several did say (in a seeming contradiction) that they had more extensive training programs for the paid students than the unpaid students. The difference appeared to be that in the case of paid workers, the more extensive training was for the benefit of the company. In the case of work experience and placement of students, the training was for the benefit of the student. One employer said, of paid student workers, 'they are here to do work, not necessarily to learn'.

The larger employers had very formalised methods for training their staff, including student workers. Typically, supermarkets and fast-food employers used training videos, seminars, mentoring systems, buddy systems, and so on. A few employers gave the same induction program for work experience and vocational-placement students; and one employer gave exactly the same induction for work experience students as for paid staff. However, the understanding of 'induction program' varied. In some cases, the program related only to personnel and health and safety issues; in other cases, it included skills training as well. Strategies used by employers to improve learning by work experience and vocational-placement students included the following:

- placing with permanent workers as mentors who had an active interest in helping school students learn
- rotating the students through different departments
- ensuring that students worked with employees who were able to pass on underlying knowledge as well as skills

Learning was not always one-way. Teachers at Murray Bridge said that employers had reported that work experience students brought new ideas and new knowledge to them. The examples given related to students using IT knowledge in workplaces. In the Adelaide focus group, one employer noted that vocational placement students were more effective learners than his own staff. Some employers also wished to know how they had fared as host employers. Canterbury Hospital asked students to evaluate their placement and found that students were surprised to be asked to evaluate the employer as opposed to the employer evaluating them. Employers commented that they rarely had any feedback, positive or negative, from schools or placement co-ordinators.

Comparing learning from different workplace activities

The amount of training given appeared to vary with the following factors:

- the level of the young person's duties
- the length of time the student was expected to be in the workplace
- the attitude of students (enthusiastic students were likely to receive more attention)

In general, these variables meant that paid workers received more training than students on vocational placements and work experience. In work experience, for example, students were likely not only to be performing a limited range of duties for a variety of reasons, but they were generally only in the workplace for a week and, in a sizeable minority of cases, were not particularly enthusiastic about their work experience week. In addition, specific industry factors were important in determining the amount of training; for example, in the construction trade extensive safety training was necessary.

Although paid work involved more training, there was, paradoxically, less emphasis on learning. More formal instruction was given to students when they were paid workers—presumably in order to make sure that they carried out tasks as required by their company—but less attention was paid to the wider learning undergone by students when they were paid workers. In general, employers and co-workers did not see paid student workers as learners, whereas students on work experience or vocational placements were seen primarily as learners.

This general difference had several specific manifestations. Paid work, for example, did not offer the opportunities to access certain industry areas or to sample careers. These opportunities, along with general work habits, were the major learning opportunities available through work experience. Moreover the range of tasks carried out in paid work was likely to be limited. In addition, employers were less tolerant of paid workers. For example, one student did work experience with an employer then got a paid job with the same employer: '[When I was on] work experience [and] did something wrong he'd tell me what I did [whereas] when I was out 'private' he'd swear and curse'.

However, it should be noted that the Canterbury group of students preferred paid work to work experience or vocational placements. They felt better trained, and felt more secure. This may simply have been related, however, to the amount of time spent in the different workplace activities.

On the whole, students were more likely to have satisfactory experiences and good learning opportunities in vocational placements than on work experience. Although some students' work experience was successful, the potential for variation was great. However, some students enjoyed work experience more than vocational placements because they had more choice over where they worked and what tasks they performed.

It must be pointed out that, in general, students were not very focussed on learning in workplaces (in any of the three forms of workplace activity). They had to be prompted to think in terms of learning. However, once prompted, some quite perceptive comments were made; for example, one student noted the difference between 'people skills' as understood by her fast-food employer and the dentist with whom she did work experience. All of the participants—students, teachers and employers alike—paid less attention to learning in paid work than in work experience or vocational placements, although the period of training was longer in paid work.

Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

Ethnicity

Students did not appear to be discriminated against in accessing either paid or unpaid work. For example, where schools had high NESB populations, it was likely that the local employers were also multicultural and, therefore, would naturally employ or host NESB students. Moreover possession of a second language was often viewed as an advantage. However, more subtle factors prevented some students accessing paid or unpaid work.

Traditional patterns of employment in an industry might discourage students from certain ethnic backgrounds from seeking employment or work experience. Also, some cultures had traditions of family businesses which might employ students from those families, meaning that such students might not look in the wider workforce for workplace activities. Parents from some cultural groups might be unwilling for students to go into certain workplaces or perform certain types of work. Poor English language skills might discourage students from seeking certain types of work, although employers tended to be fairly tolerant of students with poor English.

Employers believed that students tended to seek employment or other workplace activities in areas where people from their cultural or ethnic background were well represented. This was mentioned, particularly, but not exclusively, with relation to Aboriginal students. One school suggested that Aboriginal students might have more need to work than other students because their families tended to have low incomes, but opinions were not offered as to whether Aboriginal students were able easily to access employment. Aboriginal students, according to one employer, might sometimes provide challenges for employers because of their different priorities; for example, they might require time off for family matters which non-Aboriginal people would see as inappropriate.

Disability

Students with learning disabilities appeared to be well catered for, with teachers explaining that they found 'gentler' placements for them, and several employers obviously making special efforts to accommodate such students in work experience and vocational placements. At Plains Central, a boy with special needs had multiple vocational placements organised at a number of workplaces through informal community arrangements. However, safety concerns sometimes meant that such students, or those with physical disabilities, could not always be accommodated. Occasionally it appeared that schools made support workers available.

Both paid and unpaid work tended to be segregated along gender lines, albeit with a few notable exceptions such as Canterbury boys in fashion, hairdressing and floristry.[F] The employers insisted, however, that they were very willing to accommodate students in non-traditional gender roles but that students simply did not apply for either paid or unpaid positions outside traditional roles. One employer felt that parents might have been partly responsible for this.

Rurality

Isolation and rurality could present difficulties in accessing both paid and unpaid work. The problems related to both the number of places and the nature of experiences available. Plains Central, a remote school, had set elaborate processes in place to improve access to suitable placements and work experience opportunities. The burden on local employers to host students was felt to be extreme. By contrast, in the same area there was an excess of casual work (such as fruit-picking), and this was actually viewed as a problem because it encouraged Year 10 students to leave school without exploring other career possibilities. Other rural schools mentioned travel costs as a problem where students found work experience or vocational placements away from home.

Socioeconomic status

In Plains, the employers stated that they knew their students and their parents and liked to employ young people with 'potential'. One employer mentioned dress and 'walk(ing) quick' as indicators of potential as part-time employees. It is possible that these criteria might preclude certain groups of young people from accessing part-time jobs and also

[F] It may be possible that boys felt more able to try out non-traditional industry areas in an all-boys' school.

from accessing placements and work experience, particularly in small towns. A pattern of long-term family unemployment might also discourage students from seeking work, although little firm evidence emerged for this point. Teachers also felt that peer pressure might encourage students not to seek work, or to under-perform in the workplace, though again there was little evidence of this.

General access issues

Some access difficulties did not relate to equity issues. Teachers were very important, not only in finding work experience places and vocational placements but also, sometimes, in helping students find part-time jobs. This has been observed in the literature (Sweet 1995). Thus students were advantaged if they attended a school with such a teacher, and disadvantaged if they did not. Some industries were hard to get into, for either paid or unpaid experiences. Some popular industries such as entertainment or airlines could not or did not offer work experience possibilities; medical practices often refused access because of confidentiality; and others, like graphic design, had placements booked out years in advance. Some industries had prior safety training requirements, which schools needed to address when students sought work experience or placements in those industries. However, work experience appeared to offer access to a wider range of industries than paid work did.

What effects do such experiences of the workplace have on later access to employment and/or higher education?

This question was not discussed in much detail in any of the interviews and focus groups. However, some findings emerged. It was generally acknowledged that both work experience and vocational placements were valuable in subsequently gaining employment. This applied to part-time work as well as to later full-time employment. Sometimes the link was very direct, as many students gained jobs with their host employers—generally as part-time workers but sometimes as full-time workers. Employers liked the opportunity to identify good potential workers, and the fact that such workers were already part-trained. In smaller towns, employers knew all the other employers and, because of this, were able to check up how students had performed on work experience or on placements before employing them. Personal knowledge of other employers was preferable to cold calling for references.

Sometimes the link between placements or work experience and subsequent employment was less direct and related either to achieving certain skills or, more generally, to the acquisition of general work habits and increase in self-confidence. Some employers said that experience in vocational placements were more valued than work experience when they were recruiting full-time staff. One employer said she discounted work experience, partly because everybody did it, and partly because she herself had had poor experiences with work experience students. Another employer, though, asked potential employees whether they had *enjoyed* work experience, as this provided a good indicator of their attitude to work.

One employer felt that the most useful form of work activity in respect to future employment prospects was paid work. Several employers specifically mentioned experience at McDonalds as being particularly valued because such work instilled work habits and a willingness to accept discipline.

More generally, work experience played some role in career decisions for some students. They were either confirmed in their career choice or decided to look elsewhere. One employer commented that vocational placements as part of VET courses provided easy access to, and credit into, VET courses and perhaps even university courses. No other comments were made about links between workplace activities and future educational trajectories.

Summary

The case studies and employer reports indicated that most school students in Years 10 to 12 appeared to be involved in quite a lot of workplace activities. Most students had done work experience, and around half had paid employment. A smaller number were involved in vocational placements. There was a range of reasons why students took paid employment, and a variety of reasons why some students did not work. Sometimes they chose not to work, and sometimes they could not find local jobs. Teachers believed that lack of confidence prevented some students seeking paid work.

Many employers seemed to enjoy their involvement in work experience and placements, and devoted large amounts of resources to such programs. A few employers were less enthusiastic, feeling that students were inappropriate or inadequately prepared. Employers did not pay any particular attention to the school students who formed part of their paid workforce, although some of the employers involved in the study employed large numbers of them.

Equity issues were not as important as might have been expected. Rural students were seen as at a disadvantage because there was a limited pool of host employers for both work experience and vocational placements. Although direct discrimination was not reported, schools believed that students from some cultural backgrounds might feel unwilling to seek jobs or work experience in certain industries. Employers made every effort to accommodate work experience or placement students with disabilities, including socioeconomic disadvantage.

Employers and teachers alike expected learning to take place in vocational placements and in work experience, with learning being more focussed in the former than the latter. Teachers were more convinced of the worth of work experience than employers were; employers generally preferred placements and found more satisfaction from training placement students than from hosting work experience students. Generally, work experience was felt to provide an opportunity to sample a career area and to learn how to behave at work in regards to issues such as punctuality, dress and communication skills. Rural students might combine work experience with a visit to a bigger centre or city. Vocational placements were seen as a means of developing specific skills.

In most cases, students learned from being instructed by a supervisor or by watching another worker. Students liked learning in workplaces because they got the full attention of the person who was training them. Some students, but not all, preferred learning in workplaces to learning at school. Some would welcome the chance to have their workplace learning recognised at school, although they could foresee difficulties in implementation.

A number of difficulties were identified with relation to workplace learning, particularly in work experience and vocational placements. These included:

- being given mundane jobs
- 'floating around'—particularly likely to happen in work experience
- immediate supervisors not being interested in, or good at, training
- the workplace being too busy to spare time for training
- students' own attitude and motivation

It was generally agreed that learning would be improved with:

- better communication between schools and workplaces
- better preparation for periods in workplaces
- clear learning goals for work experience and placements
- more feedback to employers about placements/work experience
- more processing of workplace experiences back at school

Employers focussed upon learning in students' unpaid experiences but were not very interested in what their paid student workers learned beyond the very necessary training (which was often highly organised) to carry out required tasks. This has some implications in that students who have been treated as workers only, and not as learners, in their part-time jobs may not form the habit of learning at work.

It has to be said, though, that students themselves did not appear to focus much upon learning outcomes, even in their work experience or placements. While they might or might not have enjoyed workplace activities, these were generally seen by students as experiences, not as learning events.

8 Discussion of major issues emerging from the study

The study has confirmed existing evidence about school students and workplaces, confounded some evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, and complicated some of the received wisdom that exists. This process of confirming, confounding and complicating has also thrown up new issues that need to be addressed.

The conclusion will draw together these threads, first, by summarising the main findings that have arisen, using the project's original research questions and, second, by examining the implications of the findings for policy and practice.

The findings of the study

The extent and nature of school students' experiences of the workplace; and variations in access to workplaces among equity groups

Although the study was based in two States only, its findings on participation in workplace activities are confirmed by the current Victorian study (Brown, forthcoming), by anecdotal evidence and are also confirmed by another South Australian study (DETE 2000). Moreover the quantitative finding from the study are confirmed by the qualitative findings. Thus the study may be taken as representative. The findings suggest an increase in paid labour-force participation from the early 1990s (as reported in Robinson 1999)* and are as follows:

- around 60 per cent of Year 10, 11 and 12 students have had formal part-time work (50.1% when family businesses are excluded)
- around two-thirds have done work experience
- around 11 per cent have had vocational placements

When only Year 11 and 12 students are considered, participation in vocational placements increases to nearly 18 per cent and in work experience to 87 per cent.

These figures indicate that most students have at least some formal experience in workplaces, although 14.6 per cent of those in the study had had neither work experience nor paid work nor a vocational placement. While the increased rates for Years 11 and 12 indicate that most of these students might be Year 10 students, and that progression through the school system might bring workplace experiences to most children, a sizeable minority of students do leave school at the end of Year 10 or in the early months of Year 11, and some may therefore do so with no workplace experiences at all.*

Some differences in workplace participation emerged:

- students from government schools had more involvement in workplaces than students from non-government schools
- rural students had more involvement in workplaces than urban students
- girls had more involvement in workplaces than boys

* Robinson's study looked at participation at a single point in time, so the data are not strictly speaking comparable.
* As the survey was administered from August 2000 onwards, and mainly between September and November, it captured the work experience weeks for all schools involved.

- NESB students were less likely to have had paid jobs for an employer than the average
- ATSI students and those with physical disabilities relied more upon work experience and vocational placements than upon paid work for their workplace activities
- ATSI students were likely to rely mainly upon schools to help them access workplaces
- NESB students, like ATSI students, did not have much help from family and friends in accessing workplaces but were likely to rely on their own resources rather than utilising school help

It should be noted, however, that the NESB group was particularly diverse and NESB students were by no means all disadvantaged. Further analysis would reveal the different patterns within this group but was not possible within the project budget. Employers and education department policy officers discussed particular groups of NESB students (such as Muslim girls) who had problems accessing workplaces, and special programs were in place for them. The results for ATSI students, although marked, may not be representative, as few ATSI students responded to the survey. Study of ATSI participation would need to be more targeted. The case studies and employer interviews suggested that, for both ATSI and NESB students, lack of confidence and a desire to stick to industries where there was a tradition of participation of the particular group might affect participation. As with some NESB groups, special programs were in place for ATSI students in some areas.

Specific findings about engagement in paid work were as follows:

- the major reason for seeking work was for extra spending money, although around ten per cent needed the money to help support themselves or their families. Around 20 per cent sought work mainly to get experience
- student jobs differ from the general workforce in two major respects: they are more likely to be casual, and they are concentrated in two industries (fast food and retail)
- students worked on average 8.5 hours a week[8] and generally found little difficulty in fitting in their school work around their jobs
- there were many reasons why some students did not engage in paid work; these were both positive (for example, wanting to focus on study or sport) and negative (for example, unable to find a job in the local area)

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from workplace activities

The study confirmed that the three major methods of experiencing workplaces—work experience, paid work and vocational placements—had different learning purposes and learning outcomes. In all cases, it was evident that students learned most where they enjoyed the activity.

Work experience was viewed as a process of career sampling and of familiarisation with work habits. Students who had participated in the paid workforce as well as work experience still found work experience useful. It enabled them to get experience in industry areas where they were unable to access paid work. Employers thought they were not doing a particularly good job of supervision or training with work experience students; nevertheless most students found it a positive experience. Some employers complained that the schools did not prepare students well for work experience, that inappropriate or unmotivated students were sent to them, and that they did not get feedback on their performance as host employers.

Vocational placements were clearly seen as sites for developing specific skills. Employers were more comfortable with placement students than work experience students because

[8] This is actually slightly less than the Robinson (1999) report which showed that the average working week, for 17-year-olds, was nine hours in 1992. (However, since the current study included children from a range of ages the data cannot be directly compared.) Interestingly, one major Australian employer of young people, Hungry Jack's, has nine hours as its standard working week, indicating a consensus that around nine hours is a reasonable working week for school children.

they knew exactly what they had to teach them and because these students were more likely to be motivated than work experience students. This might relate partly to age, as vocational placement students were generally older. Students appeared to be well prepared at school in the skills that they used in placements, using the placements (on the whole) for practice rather than for developing entirely new skills. There were closer links between schools and workplaces with relation to vocational placements than for work experience.

Paid work was the site where the most learning seemed to take place.[d] Students developed both generic skills and specific skills best in paid work, but only slightly better than in vocational placements. Employers reported devoting more attention to paid student workers than vocational placement or work experience students in terms of training provided. Students reported feeling better trained and more secure in the workplace when they were paid workers. There were some drawbacks to part-time work as sites for learning; for example, there was less opportunity to work with adults as opposed to other teenagers, and the range of industries and tasks was narrower. The favourable learning outcomes from part-time work can be viewed mainly as a function of longevity of the workplace activity; students learned more in paid work because they were there for longer, and employers invested more in training student workers for the same reason. However, students did say that other factors, as well as length of service, were important[e] in the better learning outcomes from paid work. Interestingly, though, employers did not consider their paid workers as learners in the same way as they viewed students on work experience or vocational placements.

Students involved in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships provided different results from other paid workers. They reported being better trained than all other groups, and their generic skills were considerably more developed than other groups. Those in non-school-based apprenticeships and traineeships did not show the same trend. However, the numbers of students involved were very small, and these findings would need to be confirmed by a further study focussing particularly upon students in such arrangements.

In all three types of workplace activity, similar generic skills were developed. The following skills were best developed in each type of activity and in the same order:

- verbal communication
- how to behave at work
- using your initiative

Written communication was the least well developed, although it was best developed in vocational placements.

Specific skills (nominated by students[f]) were also similar for all types of activity; the three most often mentioned were dealing with customers, communications skills, and operating a computer. These findings concur with Misko's (1998a) study. There were differences in the order of importance between the different types of activity. Paid workers were much more likely to nominate 'dealing with customers', while work experience and vocational placement students were more likely to nominate 'operating a computer'. These differences presumably related to the different industry areas in which student workers and work experience students were engaged.

Learning methods were also similar in all three types of experience. Being shown by a supervisor or fellow worker provided most training for most students. Students found this most useful when demonstration was accompanied by explanation. Paid workers were

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[d] It should be remembered that these conclusions are drawn from the students' own responses to the questionnaire; and also from the employers' statements that they provided the most training for paid workers (as opposed to placement or work experience students). Some of the validators of this report have commented that students may have a distorted or uninformed view of their learning, and that in fact students' learning from paid work might be much narrower than they think. The study did not attempt to measure workplace learning objectively. This would be almost impossible to achieve.

[e] For budgetary reasons, students' qualitative responses on this issue could not be analysed.

[f] In around 25% of cases for paid work, and 40% for work experience and vocational placements, the specific skills nominated were too diverse to be classified.

more likely to learn from watching others than those in placements or on work experience. They were also less likely to ask questions of a supervisor. These two indicators suggested (with some support from the case studies) that perhaps they felt unwilling (especially as they were likely to be employed casually) to admit that they did not know how to do something; some students were highly aware of their vulnerability in the labour market. These forms of 'stealing knowledge' have been noted in studies of full-time workers (for example Brown & Duguid 1996). As noted by Smith (2000) in her study of full-time teenage workers, the motivation of the individual student was most important in learning; those who wanted to learn, learned more, both because they were more pro-active in seeking out learning opportunities and because staff were more inclined to teach them.

Although most students were not very focussed upon learning as an outcome of any of their workplace activities, when questioned, both in the survey and in focus groups, they were able to make quite detailed observations about learning. There was quite a considerable amount of transfer of learning between the different workplace activities, aided by the fact that for quite a few students these activities were not only in the same industry but also with the same employer.

In general, the learning which students did in workplaces was not processed or capitalised upon in schools very well. Students said they did not discuss their workplace learning much in class. This applied particularly to paid work; only around 30 per cent of students ever discussed their paid job learning in class, and a quarter never even discussed it with friends. Vocational placement students were more likely to discuss their learning in class. VET and careers teachers were often reasonably well aware of the extent of students' participation in paid work, although there was some indication that students hid the number of hours they worked. However, there was generally little effort to integrate paid work into the school curriculum, even in informal ways such as was done with work experience. Despite this lack of processing, the majority of students reported that their workplace learning (from all three sources) was of at least some benefit.

Some students (around 13%) were counting the learning from their paid jobs towards school qualifications. In a confirmation of previous findings (for example MCEETYA 2000), only a small percentage (17%) of those who were not counting their learning would like to have counted it. Around a third thought they might like to consider the idea, although students in the Year 12 focus group made a number of insightful comments about the difficulties which might be involved in such a process. It was clear that certain groups (the 'less academic', ATSI and NESB students) were more likely both to be counting their learning already and to want their learning to count. In addition, those working in fast-food jobs were more interested than those in other industry areas in having their learning counted. It was clear that some groups of students valued the chance to develop and display their skills—to 'shine'—in workplaces as compared to school, where they might be low achievers. Such students appeared to be far happier in the workplace than at school.

Effects of workplace experiences on later access to employment and/or higher education

The final research question was not a major focus of the case studies and employer interviews; however, some findings did emerge. Employers valued previous part-time working experience when seeking full-time employees, and, indeed, many student workers subsequently gained full-time work with their part-time employers. Experience in vocational placements was also valued, but work experience was not generally considered as a great advantage in gaining later full-time employment even though it often led into part-time work. However, the students viewed work experience as an important part of helping them make career decisions.

With relation to higher education, views were expressed that vocational placements as part of VET-in-Schools courses might gain credit in TAFE or university studies, and also that university-bound students might want to do VET courses in industries such as hospitality to help keep them in part-time work whilst at university. These views were not, however, widely discussed, and related to VET-in-Schools in general rather than to

vocational placements alone. One school suggested that readily available part-time work might seduce students away from school so that their education was terminated prematurely.

This final research question was not addressed at all in the survey. However, the students were asked if they were willing to participate in a later follow-up study and 413 students agreed (table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Students agreeing to participate in a follow-up study, by school year and State

	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Total
New South Wales	47	39	12	**98**
South Australia	166	103	46	**315**
Total	**213**	**142**	**58**	**413**

This will provide a good basis for a longitudinal study, although the preponderance of Year 10 students means that the study cannot usefully be carried out until 2003.

The implications of the findings for policy and practice

Policy versus practice

While policy-makers are aware of the full range of students' engagement with workplaces, the focus of current policy activity is on the activity that involves the lowest proportion of students—vocational placements. The vast majority of government schools, at least, in Australia, now offer VET courses. Yet, only a minority of students is currently taking up such courses, although numbers might be expected to increase as rapid growth has been evidenced since their inception. The indications of the survey findings, however, support other findings that take-up of VET courses is much higher among certain groups such as the 'less academic' students. This is the case overseas as well (for example Stern et al. 1997). Thus engagement in VET—and, hence, vocational placements—is not likely in the near future to extend to the majority of school students, while, by contrast, the majority of students are already in paid employment.

While there might be political reasons for focussing on VET-in-Schools, and on vocational placements as a type of workplace activity, in terms of benefiting the greatest number of students, the focus might need to shift somewhat to consideration of work experience and paid work as well.

The study showed that work experience is viewed as a valuable form of workplace activity by students and teachers alike. This finding was somewhat surprising in view of the somewhat limited amount of attention paid to work experience at a policy level and some anecdotal reports that work experience might be abandoned in favour of concentration on vocational placements. Students were clearly focussed on the career-sampling function of work experience, and valued work experience even when they also had paid jobs. Unfortunately budget constraints did not allow for analysis of the qualitative comments of students (in the questionnaire) about the value of work experience, as such analysis would enable the value of work experience to be more precisely pin-pointed. Employers were less happy with work experience than with placements, mainly because their role was less well defined. They admitted that work experience students might tend to 'float' in their workplaces, but some had useful suggestions to prevent this happening. However, few resources appear to be devoted to the support of work experience, either at school level or at State levels;[4] hence immediate or significant improvements are unlikely to be implemented in the near future. In fact, there is some belief that the growth in vocational placements is diverting both resources and the host employer pool away from work experience.

[4] New South Wales has devoted resources to supporting work experience as part of Career Education and Work Education programs.

Paid work emerged from the study as the most robust method of skills development in school students. Student workers (as opposed to work experience and vocational-placement students) learned more, felt better trained, and employers devoted more resources to training them. Contrary to popular belief, student workers did not just learn to do simple repetitive tasks but developed their generic skills to a considerable extent. While much of this can be attributed to the length of time which students spent in workplaces as student workers—compared with the time they spent on placements and on work experience—the fact nevertheless remains that paid work is the most important site of most school students' learning about workplaces. However, the following difficulties must be acknowledged:

- only 60 per cent of students do paid work as opposed to the vast majority of students who, by the end of Year 11, have done work experience
- certain groups of students do not appear to access paid work very much
- paid work is confined mainly to two industry areas, neither of which are likely to be 'career areas' for most students
- paid work can be unpleasant, exploitative and/or dangerous—although it might not necessarily be so
- employers do not regard student workers as being there to learn—nevertheless they do

While there is currently a trend in policy circles (exemplified by MCEETYA 2000) to acknowledge the value of part-time work as a learning experience—and the way in which this is envisaged is through accreditation into VET qualifications—most students, as discussed above, are unlikely to wish to take up VET qualifications. The survey clearly showed that students were not, on the whole, interested in having their paid learning 'count' for school in any way.

Using workplaces to develop learning and employment outcomes

In discussing the significance of the differences between policy and practice, there is a need to return to old arguments about the purposes of student engagement in workplaces. As was mentioned in chapter 2, skills-based learning in workplaces (as now seen in vocational placements) gained ascendancy in the early 1990s over work experience. Placements were seen as being about learning *in* the workplace rather than as learning *about* the workplace (Sweet 1994). Perhaps, in order to promote the value of placements, they were presented as being better than work experience, which was presented as being un-focussed and old-fashioned.

In the past five years the scene has shifted to see the ascendancy of VET-in-Schools in government policies. VET-in-Schools programs, of course, incorporate placements. But placements are not necessarily a central focus of VET-in-Schools, although they need to take place in order for the qualification to be issued, in most cases. Thus the focus has shifted away from what is learned in workplaces, to the gaining of a VET qualification. The purposes of VET-in-Schools have been described variously in the literature as:

- developing skills for the economy
- aiding school-to-work transition (in general and for equity groups in particular)
- providing a suitable curriculum for students who are not happy with traditional 'academic' curriculum; and, in a linked point
- encouraging some students to stay at school longer

While proponents of VET-in-Schools programs have achieved miracles with small resources and in the face of numerous obstacles, the full benefits of the programs have not yet been evidenced. Most of the achievements are self-referential; that is, the success lies in the fact that numbers have grown. Successes are also reported in terms which are referred to by Athanasóu (1996, p.8) as 'positive experiential by-products or as a remedy for the ills of secondary schooling ... [rather than] ... intentional consequences'; for example, in terms of increased self-esteem for participants. Longitudinal studies that examine the contribution of VET-in-Schools programs to skills development for the economy, and in aiding school-to-work transition, have not yet been carried out.

One difficulty with the current emphasis on VET-in-Schools is that all participation of school students in workplaces now tends to be seen as a VET-in-Schools issue. Thus employers will readily discuss placements, while at the same time virtually ignoring the presence of paid student workers in their workplaces. Yet the statistics in this report indicate that paid student work has increased during the 1990s, and that students are five times more likely to be employed in workplaces than to be undergoing vocational placements.[6]

The study has shown that learning in workplaces for vocational placement students is generally successful and a rewarding experience for both employers and students. Clearly, the structured nature of these placements and the arrangements for linking the school-based course and the workplace have led to good learning outcomes. Many of these lessons could be transferred to work experience, which, although still valuable to students, causes employers some discomfort and provides less valuable learning outcomes. Students are seven times more likely to undertake work experience than vocational placements, giving ample reason for the same level of attention to be devoted to work experiences as to vocational placements. In particular, there appears to be a need for closer links between schools and workplaces. In order for these work experience policies and procedures to be improved, however, the 'intentional consequences' (Athanasou 1996) of work experience need first to be established. Learning *about* the workplace, for example, is likely to be a greater feature of work experience than learning *in* the workplace, but such learning is currently not well structured. Plains Central School, which combined work experience with a taste of living in larger population centres and resulted in students producing portfolios of work and references, provides a good example of structured work experience.

While vocational placements have good learning outcomes, the outcomes for paid work are actually greater. The study confounds United States studies such as Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) and Munro (1992) which suggest that student-working aids neither development nor learning. The successful learning outcomes for paid work occur, in the main, without any preparation or encouragement from schools and are a result solely of employer training and student initiative in seeking out learning. Were the same amount of effort to be put into school-based activities, based on paid work as advocated, for example, by Billett (1999) and as has been piloted in one school in South Australia (VETNETWORKER 2000), it might be expected that the superiority of paid work over other workplace activities might be even greater. The exceptional (but provisional) results in this study for school-based apprentices and trainees indicate that this might already be happening for such students.

There would, however, be difficulties associated with such a course of action. Control of paid work is completely out of the hands of schools, and employers are not always benevolent. Thus students who worked with 'bad' employers would be disadvantaged. Workplaces have many disadvantages as sites of learning, which are well rehearsed in the literature. Moreover the study clearly showed that employers did not see student workers as learners and, therefore, might not be willing to participate in any activity which required them to spend more time ensuring the development of learning in their part-time teenage workforces. Students also exhibit strong resistance to formal links between school and work, at least in terms of accrediting their learning for school purposes. There is a strong feeling that students want to keep work separate from school.

In terms of the intended outcomes from students' involvement with workplaces, student-working is likely to be a desirable method of increasing both skills levels in the economy and in aiding successful school-to-work transitions. Because of the larger participation of students in paid work than vocational placements, it would appear to be a more effective route for achieving these aims. However, in terms of individual outcomes, there will always be students who choose not to work part time, generally because they do not need an income and/or they wish to defer their vocational preparation until a later time. In such cases, lack of engagement with workplaces is not generally seen as a disadvantage.

[6] Recent ECEF statistics suggest that around one-quarter of all Year 11 and 12 students are likely to have a vocational placement during the year 2001, somewhat redressing the balance between placements and paid work.

There will also be groups of students who, for special reasons, will not be able easily to access paid work. The role of the school, for example, in helping ATSI students experience workplaces is vital, and will continue to be so. The study revealed 'pockets' of such students, who have, in general, already been identified by educational policy staff and are being helped by special programs. Some students clearly prefer being in workplaces rather than being in school, and for these students the most beneficial way of enabling them to be in workplaces needs to be established.

Summary

The study has shown very clearly that part-time work is now a normal part of life for the majority of students in Years 10, 11 and 12. While some groups of students are less likely to access paid work than others, the differences in labour force participation among equity groups are less than might have been expected. Work experience remains an almost universal experience, at least by the end of Year 11, and vocational placements are increasing in importance. However, experiencing workplaces through vocational placements is still relatively uncommon (involving less than a sixth of Year 11 and 12 students in the sample surveyed) and is not likely to become as common as either paid work or work experience.

Thus, while State education departments, teachers and specially formed bodies such as the ASTF have been working hard to increase students' participation in workplaces through vocational placements, students have been mounting their own assault on workplaces through paid work, as well as continuing their involvement in work experience. The emphasis on vocational placements, as a part of VET-in-Schools programs, has diverted attention and resources away from ways of improving students' experiences in paid work and in work experience.

In the scramble to find and administer vocational placements, less attention has been paid to the issue of learning in placements—except insofar as such learning can be turned into VET qualifications. A similar process of 'capturing in qualifications' is currently being envisaged for part-time work. The evidence, however, suggests that school students do not have an interest in having their part-time work 'colonised' by the education system. Yet on the other hand, the study suggests that the learning outcomes of part-time work may be greater than those of other means of experiencing workplaces. However, paid employment for student workers is available only in a limited range of industries. The most common form of experiencing workplaces—work experience—has been virtually ignored in recent debates, yet the study has shown that there is clearly room for improvement of learning outcomes in work experience.

The study therefore raises some questions, which need further investigation:

- How can learning from part-time work be captured and utilised in a way which is both attractive to students and practicable for employers?
- How can student workers be encouraged to begin their careers as lifelong learners through seeing their paid work as a learning opportunity?
- How can the lessons which have been learned from vocational placements be transferred to work experience to make the latter a more satisfying experience for all students and employers?
- How can those 'pockets' of students who face challenges in accessing workplaces continue to be assisted to ensure they are not disadvantaged as more of the 'mainstream' student population expands its involvement in workplaces?

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Appendices

Appendices

1 Key stakeholders consulted at commencement of project

2 Questionnaire

What you have learned from your paid and unpaid work
Section 1: About you
Section 2: Overview of your working experience
Section 3: Work experience
Section 4: Paid work
Section 5: Structured work placement (usually connected with a 'VET' or 'vocational education' course you are doing)

3 Case study and employer interview protocols

School case studies

4 School case studies

Le Fevre High School, South Australia—Sue Erickson
Maidstone Boys' School, New South Wales—Erica Smith
Murray Bridge High School, South Australia—Steve Keirl
Plains Central School, New South Wales—Annette Green
Treedera High School—Annette Green and Ros Brennan
Year 12 students focus group, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales—Annette Green

5 Employer reports

Employer report, Adelaide—Erica Smith and Kelly Slee
Employer report, Plains—Annette Green
Employer report, Sydney—Erica Smith
Employer report, Treedera—Annette Green

1 Key stakeholders consulted at commencement of project

Name	Position
Peter Both	Project Officer for schools-based apprenticeship programs, South Australia DETE
Hetty Cislowski	Vocational Education in Schools Director, DET New South Wales
Kym Clayton	Executive Officer to MCEETYA VET-in-Schools taskforce (located at South Australia DETE)
Bernie Fitzsimons	VET Adviser, South Australia Catholic Education Office
Mike Frost	VETNETwork, Director
Ashley Hogan	Information Officer, Australian Student Traineeship Foundation
Jane Kenway	University of South Australia, Professor of Education
Helen Lambert	Independent Schools Board VET Officer, South Australia
David Lymm	DETE South Australia, Enterprise and Vocational Education team
Brad Main	Acting Principal Education Officer for schools-based traineeships, New South Wales DET
Julie Owens	Director, Corporate Relations, McDonalds Australia
Toby Prentice	DET New South Wales, Acting Co-ordinator of Enterprise and Community-based learning section
John Spierings	Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Executive Officer
Richard Teese	University of Melbourne, Associate Professor of Education
Noelene Walsh & Jim Bost	Traineeship Co-ordinators, Coles South Australia
Paul Willis	Principal Development Officer—VET-in-Schools, DETE South Australia

2 Questionnaire

On the following pages is the reproduced questionnaire which was administered to school students.

What you have learned from your paid and unpaid work

Introduction

Thank you for helping us with our survey. It is part of a research project being carried out by Charles Sturt University in New South Wales, and the University of South Australia. The project has been approved by your State Education Department.

We want to find out how many students have jobs, and how many go on work experience and work placements. We are particularly interested in finding out what students learn from their experiences in workplaces.

We will be returning to some schools to carry out some interviews with students, teachers and local employers to find out in more depth about some of the issues in the survey.

After we have finished the project, in 2001, we will publicise the results on Triple J radio, in the national press, and in some of the magazines you might read.

What do I have to do?

The index below is to help you decide which sections of the questionnaire apply to you. Although the questionnaire looks quite long, if you work steadily it should not take too long to complete. Before you hand your booklet in, please tick the sections you have completed. Your answers will be kept confidential and your name will not be recorded on your questionnaire.

If you have any questions as you work through the survey, or need assistance, please ask the researcher who is visiting your school. Everyone from your school who has fully completed his or her questionnaire will be entered in a draw for a CD voucher.

Index

Section no	Pages	What it's about	Question nos	Who should complete it	Tick if completed
	2–3	About you	1–12	Everyone	
	4	Overview of your working experience	13–16	Everyone	
	5–8	Work Experience	17–36	People who have done work experience	
	9–15	Paid work (your longest-lasting paid job)	37–70	People who have had a paid job	
The section below is not part of the booklet. If it applies to you, please ask the researcher for this section.					
	Separate section	Structured Work Placement	71–96	People who have done a structured work placement (as part of a subject)	

Section 1: About you

We have asked a few questions about you and your background to see whether young people's backgrounds affect their participation in work and work placements.

Please be assured that these details will be kept confidential and that your name will not be recorded on your questionnaire.

1. What school do you attend? .....

2. Which year of school are you in?
   - ❑ Year 10
   - ❑ Year 11
   - ❑ Year 12

3. What age are you?
   - ❑ 15
   - ❑ 16
   - ❑ 17
   - ❑ 18
   - ❑ 19
   - ❑ Other

4. What gender are you?
   - ❑ Male
   - ❑ Female

5. Do any of the following apply? (Tick as many as are relevant)
   - ❑ You are Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander
   - ❑ English is not the main language spoken in your home
   - ❑ English is the main language spoken at home but at least one of your parents was born in a non-English-speaking country

6. Do you have a physical disability?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No

   If yes, please briefly describe your disability .....

7. Do you have a learning disability?
   - ❑ Yes
   - ❑ No

   If yes, please briefly describe your disability .....

8. This question asks you to think about your family and money. Do you consider that your family's financial situation is:
   - ❑ Above average
   - ❑ About average
   - ❑ Below average

9. Compared with others in your year, are your school marks generally:
   - ❑ Above average
   - ❑ About average
   - ❑ Below average

10. When do you plan to leave school?

- ❑ At the end of Year 10
- ❑ At the end of Year 11
- ❑ At the end of Year 12
- ❑ Not sure

11. Immediately after school, which one of the following are you most likely to do:

- ❑ A university course full-time (straight away or deferred)?
- ❑ A TAFE course full-time?
- ❑ An apprenticeship?
- ❑ A traineeship?
- ❑ Full-time or part-time work but not in an apprenticeship or traineeship?
- ❑ Not sure
- ❑ Other .....

12. Are you willing to participate in a future follow-up study to see whether students' workplace experiences affect their future careers? This would take place after you left school.

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If 'yes' please complete the separate green form with your name and home address. (This form will be separated from your questionnaire to keep your questionnaire replies confidential.)

Section 2: Overview of your working experience

In this section we want you to tell us about all your experiences in workplaces

Unpaid experiences

13. Please write down how many of each of the following types of unpaid workplace experiences you have had since you started secondary school (high school):

- ❑ work experience? (usually for one week in years 10 or 11, not connected to a course)
- ❑ a structured work placement (usually connected with a course you are doing)?
- ❑ unpaid work in a family business or family farm ?
- ❑ voluntary work for a charity or community organisation ?
- ❑ other unpaid work ? Please give details .....

Paid experiences

NB: Please do NOT include household chores (jobs around the home) in any of your answers.

14. Please write down how many of each of the following types of paid workplace experiences you have had since you started secondary school:

- ❑ paid part-time work in an apprenticeship or traineeship arranged through school?
- ❑ paid part-time work in an apprenticeship or traineeship which is unconnected with school?
- ❑ paid work in a family business or family farm?
- ❑ other paid work for an employer?
- ❑ work in your own 'business' for which you got paid (e.g. web-page design, babysitting)?
- ❑ other paid work ? *Please give details* .....

15. Have you ever had more than one regular paid job at the one time?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

16. How many hours of paid work did you do altogether last week (i.e. from Monday to Sunday)? .....

Section 3: Work experience

Some general questions about your work experience

17. During which year of school did you do your work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Before Year 10
- ❑ Year 10
- ❑ Year 11
- ❑ Year 12

18. How long did you work there? (Tick one box)

- ❑ 1 week full-time
- ❑ More than one week full-time. *Please say how long* .....
- ❑ Other. Please give details (e.g. one day a week for a month) .....

19. In what sort of industry was your work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Farming, forestry, fishing, mining
- ❑ Manufacturing (in a factory or similar)
- ❑ Building including electrical and plumbing
- ❑ Retailing (shop work)
- ❑ Fast food, cafes or restaurants
- ❑ Cultural, recreational or sporting
- ❑ Banking/real estate/insurance
- ❑ Government administration including education and defence
- ❑ Health, personal and community services (including child care)
- ❑ Communications/media/computing
- ❑ Other (please give details) .....

20. Who made the first contact with the employer? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Me
- ❑ My parent
- ❑ A friend of my own age
- ❑ An adult friend or family friend
- ❑ The school
- ❑ Other (please give details) .....

21. How much did you enjoy the work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

22. Please add any other comments you would like to give us about the work experience or which might help to explain your answers about it

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Learning from your work experience

Now we want you to answer some detailed questions about what you learned and how you were trained in your work experience.

23. At the beginning of the work experience, did you have any of the following? (Tick as many as apply)

- ❑ A formal induction off the job? *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training off the job. *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training on the job. *For about how many hours?* .....

Some definitions:

Induction training: *When you start work, someone tells you about the particular workplace and the way it operates, and the rules you have to follow.*

Skills training: *When someone trains you to do specific tasks.*

Off-the-job: *Training for the workplace which takes place away from where you carry out the job (e.g. in a training room, at your company's regional office, or in TAFE).*

On-the-job: *Training given to you while you are working where you normally carry out the job.*

24. After you began work and had received your initial training, how did you learn about what to do?

This question asks you to think about some ways people learn at work and then choose the three which you used most in your work experience.

Here are some ways in which people learn at work:

a. Watching others
b. Being shown by a trainer or supervisor
c. Being shown by fellow worker(s)
d. Reading company manuals
e. Doing an off the job course
f. Asking questions of a supervisor
g. Asking questions of a fellow-worker
h. Trial and error ('having a go')
i. Other .....
j. I knew how to do it already. Please say from where .....

Now choose the three from the above list that worked best for you in your work experience, and write them in order of importance:

Most important .....

Second most important .....

Third most important .....

25. How much responsibility would you say you had in this period of work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ None
- ❑ All I was allowed to do was observe

26. During your work experience, were you able to use your initiative (for example to find extra things to do, or to make suggestions about changing the way things were done at work?) (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

27. Working with adults (Tick one of the following)

- ❑ I spent most of my time working with adult workers
- ❑ I spent most of my time working with teenage workers
- ❑ I worked about equally with adults and teenagers

28. Special skills

Is there an important specific skill someone would need in order to do this job? *Examples might be dealing with customers or operating a computer.* Please write it down and then circle one of the three responses to say how well you learned this skill on work experience.

Special skill .....

Learned it well/I learned it a bit/ I knew it already

If you 'knew it already', say from where: (Tick one box)

- ❑ School
- ❑ A paid job
- ❑ Voluntary work
- ❑ Home
- ❑ Other. Please give details .....

Please list any other specific skills which you learned in this period of work experience

.....

29. General skills

You might have learned or developed some 'general skills' in this period of work experience. These are skills which could be used in lots of places. You probably had some general skills to some extent already. In this case we want to know whether you developed them further.

Did you develop the following general skills in this period of work experience? (Tick one box on each line.)

	A lot	Some	A bit	Not at all
Communication in writing				
Verbal (oral) communication				
Planning and organising				
Working in teams				
Using your initiative				
Solving problems				
How to behave at work				

30. How well were you trained for the job? (Tick one statement that most closely describes your opinion.)

- ❑ I always felt clear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ Sometimes I was unclear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ I was usually unclear about how to carry out tasks

31. Contact with school during work experience (Tick as many as apply)

- ❑ A school teacher visited me once only
- ❑ A school teacher visited me more than once
- ❑ A school teacher phoned me
- ❑ I had a workbook from school which I had to fill in

32. Assessment of your performance on work experience (Tick as many boxes as apply)

- ❑ A supervisor or workplace trainer wrote a written report on my performance
- ❑ A school teacher wrote a written report on my performance

33. How much did what you learned at school help you in this period of work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all
- ❑ Please say how .....

34. How much has what you learned in this period of work experience helped you at school? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all
- ❑ Please say how .....

35. Back at school have you discussed what you did or learned in this period of work experience? (Circle one option on each line)

- ❑ In class time: Often/occasionally/never
- ❑ With friends: Often/occasionally/never

36. We are very interested in anything else you think you learned from doing your work experience. Please add your comments here. Make your comments as broad as you like.

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Section 4: Paid work

We would like some information about **your longest-lasting paid job since you began Year 10** (it's OK to include a job which began before Year 10 and then carried on into Year 10 or beyond).

By **longest-lasting** we mean the job at which you have spent the greatest total amount of time.

Please note we are not seeking information about household chores (jobs around the home) for which you are paid.

Some general questions about your paid job

37. What type of paid job was this? (Tick one box)

- ❑ paid part-time work in an apprenticeship or traineeship arranged through school?
- ❑ paid part-time work in an apprenticeship or traineeship which is/was unconnected with school?
- ❑ paid work in a family business?
- ❑ paid work for an employer (not one of the above)?
- ❑ work in your own 'business' for which you got paid (e.g. web-page design, babysitting)?
- ❑ any other paid work ? *Please give details* .....

38. During which year of school did this job commence? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Before Year 10
- ❑ Year 10
- ❑ Year 11
- ❑ Year 12

39. How long did you work there/have you been working there? (Tick one box)

- ❑ 1 week to 4 weeks
- ❑ 1–6 months
- ❑ 7–12 months
- ❑ More than 12 months

40. Are you still employed there? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

41. Type of employment arrangement

Tick the box that applies to the current or most recent terms under which you are/were employed

- ❑ Continuing (continuing through term time and school holidays) permanent
- ❑ Continuing (continuing through term time and school holidays) casual
- ❑ Term time (only in school terms)
- ❑ Only in school holidays
- ❑ Occasional (one-off or from time to time)

42. About how many hours a week (average) do you/did you attend? ..... hrs

43. In what sort of industry is/was the job? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Farming, forestry, fishing, mining
- ❑ Manufacturing (in a factory or similar)
- ❑ Building including electrical and plumbing
- ❑ Retailing (shop work)
- ❑ Fast food, cafes or restaurants
- ❑ Cultural, recreational or sporting
- ❑ Banking/real estate/insurance
- ❑ Government administration including education and defence
- ❑ Health, personal and community services (including child care centres)
- ❑ Communications/media/computing
- ❑ Babysitting
- ❑ Newspaper delivery
- ❑ Other (please give details .....

44. How did you find out about the job? (don't complete for 'own business') (Tick one box)

- ❑ Through the school
- ❑ It was advertised in the paper
- ❑ I saw an advert on a local noticeboard
- ❑ A family member told me about it
- ❑ A friend told me about it
- ❑ I contacted the employer to see if they would take me
- ❑ Other (please give details .....

45. Who made the first contact with the employer? (don't complete for 'own business') (Tick one box)

- ❑ Me
- ❑ My parent
- ❑ A friend of my own age
- ❑ An adult friend or adult family friend/relative
- ❑ The school
- ❑ Other (please give details .....

46. Reason for doing the job

This question asks you to think about some reasons why school students look for part-time jobs and then to choose the three most important reasons for you in going for your job.

Here are some reasons why school students get part-time jobs:

a. I or my family needed the money for living expenses
b. I wanted extra spending money
c. I wanted general experience of work
d. I wanted specific experience in an industry I would like to work in later
e. To keep myself busy or out of the house
f. I thought I would enjoy it
g. To be more independent
h. My parent(s) told me to do it

Now choose the three most important from the above list for you in relation to this job and write them in order of importance:

Most important .....

Second most important .....

Third most important .....

47. How much do/did you enjoy the job? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

48. How hard is/was it to fit in time for your school work as well as this job? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Very hard
- ❑ Quite hard
- ❑ Not hard

49. Please add any other comments you would like to give us about this job or which might help to explain your answers about it

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Learning from your paid job

Now we want you to answer some detailed questions about what you learned and how you were trained in your paid job.

50. At the beginning of the job, did you have any of the following? (Tick as many as apply)

- ❑ A formal induction off the job? *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training off the job. *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training on the job. *For about how many hours?* .....

Some definitions

Induction training: *When you start work, someone tells you about the particular workplace and the way it operates, and the rules you have to follow.*

Skills training: *When someone trains you to do specific tasks.*

Off-the-job: *Training for the workplace which takes place away from where you carry out the job (e.g. in a training room, at your company's regional office, or in TAFE).*

On-the-job: *Training given to you while you are working where you normally carry out the job.*

51. After you began work and had received your initial training, how did you learn about what to do? This question asks you to think about some ways people learn at work and then choose the three which you used most.

Here are some ways in which people learn at work:

a. Watching others
b. Being shown by a trainer or supervisor
c. Being shown by fellow worker(s)
d. Reading company manuals
e. Doing an off the job course
f. Asking questions of a supervisor
g. Asking questions of a fellow-worker
h. Trial and error ('having a go')
i. Other .....
j. I knew how to do it already. Please say from where .....

Now choose the three from the above list that worked best for you in your job, and write them in order of importance:

Most important .....

Second most important .....

Third most important .....

52. How much responsibility would you say you had in this job? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ None
- ❑ All I was allowed to do was observe

53. During your job, were you able to use your initiative (for example to find extra things to do, or to make suggestions about changing the way things were done at work?) (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

54. Working with adults (Tick one of the following)

- ❑ I spent/spend most of my time working with adult workers
- ❑ I spent/spend most of my time working with teenage workers
- ❑ I worked/work about equally with adults and teenagers

55. Special skills

Is there an important specific skill someone would need in order to do this job? *Examples might be dealing with customers or operating a computer.* Please write it down and then circle one of the three responses to say how well you learned this skill in this job.

Special skill .....

I learned it well/I learned it a bit/ I knew it already

56. If you 'knew it already', say from where: (Tick one box)

- ❑ School
- ❑ Another paid job
- ❑ Work experience
- ❑ Voluntary work
- ❑ Home
- ❑ Other (please give details) .....

Please list any other specific skills which you learned in this job .....

.....

57. General skills

You might have learned or developed some 'general skills' in this job. These are skills which could be used in lots of places. You probably had some general skills to some extent already. In this case we want to know whether you developed them further.

Did you develop the following general skills in this job? *(Tick one box on each line).*

	A lot	Some	A bit	Not at all
Communication in writing				
Verbal (oral) communication				
Planning and organising				
Working in teams				
Using your initiative				
Solving problems				
How to behave at work				

58. How well were you trained for the job? (Tick one statement that most closely describes your opinion)

- ❑ I always felt clear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ Sometimes I was unclear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ I was usually unclear about how to carry out tasks

59. Did what you have learned at school help in this job? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

Please say how .....

60. Has what you learned in this job helped you at school? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

Please say how .....

61. Back at school have you discussed what you did or learned in this job? (Circle one option on each line)

- ❑ In class time: Often/occasionally/never
- ❑ With friends: Often/occasionally/never

62. Are you counting any of your learning from this job towards your School Certificate or HSC (NSW) or SACE (SA)?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If you answered No to question 61, would you like to count it towards your School Certificate or HSC (NSW) or SACE (SA)?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Maybe

63. We are very interested in anything else you think you learned from doing this job. Please add your comments here. Make your comments as broad as you like.

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Comparing the learning from your paid job(s) and work experience

In this section, think about all the paid jobs you have had (if you have had more than one)

64. Did you learn more from your paid job(s) or your work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Work experience
- ❑ Paid job(s)

65. If you answered 'paid job(s)', please give the most important reason (Tick one box)

- ❑ The paid job(s) went for longer than work experience
- ❑ Some other reason (please give details) .....

66. Please describe briefly any of your learning that transferred between your paid job(s) and your work experience (in either direction)

From paid job to work experience: .....

.....

From work experience to paid job: .....

.....

67. Did you learn anything from your work experience that you did not learn in your paid job(s)? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Nothing

Please give details .....

68. Did you learn anything from your paid job(s) that you did not learn in your work experience? (Tick one box)

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Nothing

Please give details .....

69. Considering that you have had paid work, was work experience useful for you? (Tick one box)

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Please say why.....

70. Do you have any other comments which compare the learning from your different experiences of workplaces?

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Section 5: Structured work placement (usually connected with a 'VET' or 'vocational education' course you are doing)

Please answer for your longest-lasting placement

General questions about your work placement

71. During which year of school did you do the placement? *Tick one box*

- ❑ Before Year 10
- ❑ Year 10
- ❑ Year 11
- ❑ Year 12

72. How long did your placement last? Please give details, e.g. 'one day a week for a term', or '80 hours'

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73. In what sort of industry was your work placement? *Tick one box*

- ❑ Farming, forestry, fishing, mining
- ❑ Manufacturing (in a factory or similar)
- ❑ Building including electrical and plumbing
- ❑ Retailing (shop work)
- ❑ Fast food, cafes or restaurants
- ❑ Cultural, recreational or sporting
- ❑ Banking/real estate/insurance

- ❑ Government administration including education and defence
- ❑ Health, personal and community services (including child care)
- ❑ Communications/media/computing
- ❑ Other (please give details)

74. Who made the first contact with the employer? *Tick one box*

- ❑ Me
- ❑ My parent
- ❑ A friend of my own age
- ❑ An adult friend or adult family friend/relative
- ❑ The school
- ❑ Other (please give details)

75. How much did you enjoy the placement? *Tick one box*

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

76. Please add any other comments you would like to give us about this placement or which might help to explain your answers about it.

.....

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Learning from your structured work placement

Now we want you to answer some detailed questions about what you learned and how you were trained on your placement.

77. At the beginning of the placement, did you have any of the following? Tick as many as apply

- ❑ A formal induction off the job? *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training off the job. *For about how many hours?* .....
- ❑ Skills training on the job. *For about how many hours?* .....

Some definitions

Induction training: *When you start work, someone tells you about the particular workplace and the way it operates, and the rules you have to follow.*

Skills training: *When someone trains you to do specific tasks.*

Off-the-job: *Training for the workplace which takes place away from where you carry out the job (e.g. in a training room, at your company's regional office, or in TAFE).*

On-the-job: *Training given to you while you are working where you normally carry out the job.*

78. After you began the placement and had received your initial training, how did you learn about what to do?

This question asks you to think about some ways people learn at work and then choose the three which you used most.

Here are some ways in which people learn at work:

- ❑ Watching others
- ❑ Being shown by a trainer or supervisor
- ❑ Being shown by fellow worker(s)

- ❑ Reading company manuals
- ❑ Doing an off the job course
- ❑ Asking questions of a supervisor
- ❑ Asking questions of a fellow-worker
- ❑ Trial and error ('having a go')
- ❑ Other .....
- ❑ I knew how to do it already. Please say from where .....

79. Now choose the three from the above list that worked best for you in your placement, and write them in order of importance:

- ❑ Most important .....
- ❑ Second most important .....
- ❑ Third most important .....

80. How much responsibility would you say you had in this placement? Tick one box

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ None
- ❑ All I was allowed to do was observe

81. During your placement, were you able to use your initiative (for example to find extra things to do, or to make suggestions about changing the way things were done at work?) Tick one box

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all

82. Working with adults Tick one of the following

- ❑ I spent/spend most of my time working with adult workers
- ❑ I spent/spend most of my time working with teenage workers
- ❑ I worked/work about equally with adults and teenagers

83. Special skills

Is there an important specific skill someone would need in order to do this job? *Examples might be dealing with customers or operating a computer.* Please write it down and then circle one of the three responses to say how well you learned this skill in this placement.

Special skill .....

I learned it well/I learned it a bit/I knew it already

If you 'knew it already', say from where: Tick one box

- ❑ School
- ❑ A paid job
- ❑ Work experience
- ❑ Voluntary work
- ❑ Home
- ❑ Other. Please give details .....

Please list any other specific skills which you learned in this placement .....

84. General skills

You might have learned or developed some 'general skills' during this placement. These are skills which could be used in lots of places. You probably had some general skills to some extent already. In this case we want to know whether you developed them further.

Did you develop the following general skills in this placement? Tick one box on each line.

	A lot	Some	A bit	Not at all
Communication in writing				
Verbal (oral) communication				
Planning and organising				
Working in teams				
Using your initiative				
Solving problems				
How to behave at work				

85. How well were you trained for your placement? Tick one box

- ❑ I always felt clear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ Sometimes I was unclear about how to carry out tasks
- ❑ I was usually unclear about how to carry out tasks

86. Contact with school during work placement. Tick as many as apply

- ❑ A school teacher visited me once
- ❑ A school teacher visited me more than once
- ❑ A school teacher phoned me
- ❑ I had a workbook from school which I had to fill in

87. Assessment of your performance on your placement. Tick as many boxes as apply

- ❑ A supervisor or trainer wrote a written report on my performance
- ❑ A school teacher wrote a written report on my performance
- ❑ Other. Please give details .....

88. How much did what you have learned in the related course help you in this placement? Tick one box

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all
- ❑ Please say how .....

89. How much has what you learned in this placement helped you at school in the related course? Tick one box

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all
- ❑ Please say how .....

90. How much has what you learned in this placement helped you at school more generally? Tick one box

- ❑ A lot
- ❑ Some
- ❑ A bit
- ❑ Not at all
- ❑ Please say how .....

91. Back at school have you discussed what you did or learned in this placement? Circle one option on each line

- ❑ In class time: Often/occasionally/never
- ❑ With friends: Often/occasionally/never

92. We are very interested in anything else you think you learned from doing this placement. Please add your comments here. Make your comments as broad as you like.

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Comparing your learning from paid job(s), work experience and a structured work placement

93. Please rank (1 to 3) the amount you learned from the three experiences of the workplace. Rank the boxes 1 to 3. 1 is the experience where you learned the most.

- ❑ Work experience
- ❑ Structured work placement
- ❑ Paid job(s)

94. If 'paid job(s)' was first, give the main reason. Tick one box

- ❑ The paid job(s) went for longest
- ❑ Some other reason (please give details) .....

95. Please describe briefly any learning that transferred between your paid job(s), your work experience and your structured work placement (please say in which direction or directions)

.....

.....

96. Considering that you have had paid work, was work experience useful for you? Tick one box

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ Please give reasons .....

97. Do you have any other comments which compare the learning from the different experiences of workplaces?

Appendix 3: Case study and employer interview protocols

School case studies

Students

Composition of focus group (1 or 2 per school).

8–10 students in each group; each having been involved in at least two of: work experience, work placement and paid part-time work.

Discussion questions

- What (if any) are the barriers in getting access to workplace experiences of your choice?
- What did you learn from each of your experiences in workplaces?
- How did you learn it?
- What helped you learn and what were the barriers to learning?
- What are the similarities and the differences between what you learned from paid work and (a) work experience and (b) work placements?
- Do you think work experience was valuable?
- How could school better prepare you for learning in workplaces and how could you utilise your workplace-learning experiences better in your school work?
- Do you want recognition for what you learned in your part-time jobs, and what form of recognition?

Teachers/careers advisers

Composition of focus group (1 per school).

Group to consist of careers advisers, vocational education teachers, and other personnel identified by principal as appropriate.

Discussion questions

- What (if any) barriers do your students face in gaining access to workplace experiences of their choice? How could these barriers be overcome?
- What do your students learn from each of their experiences in workplaces and how do they learn it?
- What barriers are there to effective learning in workplaces and how might they be overcome?
- What are the similarities and differences between learning from paid work and (a) work experience and (b) work placements?
- What are the relative merits of each of the different types of workplace experiences?
- How could schools better prepare students for workplace experiences and how could learning from such experiences be incorporated in the curriculum?

Employers

Composition of focus group or interview respondents.

8–10 employers, a mixture of those who employ students as workers, and host work experience and/or placements.

Discussion questions

- How do you recruit students for jobs and/or placements/work experience?
- What sort of training is provided for students in each of these types of workplace experiences?
- How else do students learn to do their jobs?
- What helps students learn in workplaces and what barriers exist to learning?
- What are the links which exist between workplaces and schools relating to students undergoing different types of workplace experiences?
- Are students formally assessed during any of their workplace experiences?
- When recruiting full-time staff, in what way are you influenced by any previous workplace experiences they might have had?

Appendix 4: School case studies

Note: New South Wales schools are referred to by pseudonyms. South Australian schools are referred to by name. All names of people—students and teachers alike—are pseudonyms.

Le Fevre High School, South Australia
Sue Erickson

Background information

Le Fevre High School had 650 students and was located in the north-western suburbs of Adelaide. The area around the school was made up of a mixture of commercial, industrial and residential developments, and, because of this mix, there was a wide range of socioeconomic factors that affect the school and its profile. Students' families ranged from very wealthy to extremely poor, with a number of parents being long-term unemployed. The school had the largest number of Aboriginal students doing SACE exams in South Australia, and the school's population included about 50 Torres Strait Islander students.

Research method

After an initial contact with the Principal, all the arrangements were made with the VET co-ordinator. He was keen to learn more details about the range and extent of work experiences of students at the school, and thought it would be an educational experience for some of the students to be involved in a focus group. Two groups were arranged, one with students from Years 11 and 12, and another with staff involved with VET-in-Schools and the Work Education Program which included work experience. Both of these focus groups were conducted at the school in a conference room, the students and VET co-ordinator in the first group, followed by the seven staff members. Both focus groups were taped. All participants were most responsive and helpful in providing the data sought.

Student group

This group consisted of eight students: six from Year 11 and two from Year 12. The Year 12 students had finished exams and completed their schooling but, on invitation from the VET co-ordinator, had come back for the focus group. One of these Year 12 students ('Jackson') had accepted an apprenticeship, which had been offered as a direct result of his participation in the Engineering Pathways Program. He was going to sign the papers that very afternoon. The VET co-ordinator also sat in on the focus group. This did not inhibit the students' responses in any way, and it was obvious that he had a good rapport with the students and they valued the work he had done on their behalf.

The following table gives details of the students in the focus group. All names are pseudonyms.

Teacher group

This group was made up of seven staff members: four males and three females. They included the assistant principal, the VET co-ordinator, two technical studies teachers, a hospitality and business studies teacher, and a contract teacher who taught in the areas of work education and industrial studies. All of these staff were involved in delivering a range of VET subjects. These included the Engineering Pathways Program (EPP), modules from the VET Hospitality Certificate, the Certificate in Business Administration, some components of

the Certificate II in Information Technology, as well as the Work Education subject that included work experience.

Name	Year	Work experience	Vocational placement	Paid work
Sally	11	Supermarket	Engineering	Supermarket Fast food
Kristy	11	Supermarket	–	Supermarket
Alice	11	Optical surgery	–	Supermarket
Drew	11	Attendant at adventure park	Engineering	Adventure park
Brad	11	Carpentry/joinery	–	Carpentry
Marie	12	Butcher shop	–	Butcher
Jackson	12	Maritime business Electronics	Engineering Pathways	Electronics
Sam	11	Metal fabrication	–	Metal fabrication

What is the extent and nature of the way in which school students in Years 10, 11 and 12 experience the workplace?

All students at the school did a period of work experience, either as a part of a Work Education subject or separately. Most of the students in the focus group had opted for work experience in a field that was familiar to them (such as checkout operation). Some had decided to try a different experience and contacted local employers, while others used a relative or friend.

In Years 11 and 12, many vocational placements were part of the Engineering Pathway vocational education program, which is linked to the local Institute of TAFE. In addition, vocational education programs were available in hospitality, business administration and information technology (IT).

Teachers estimated that over 50 per cent of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 had some form of part-time work. The VET co-ordinator noted that, in particular, some Aboriginal students with long-term unemployed parents needed part-time work to help support their parents. In fact, all of the student focus group participants had paid work, with the number of hours worked ranging from occasional summer casual holiday work to 30 hours per week. Students were often reluctant to say 'no' to employers when they were asked to work long hours: they feared losing their jobs. The extent of hours worked came as a surprise to the VET co-ordinator. He was unaware of the amount of time spent out of school at paid work. He did know of some students who had failed to submit final assessments because they were too busy with their part-time work.

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

The students considered learning from work experience to be more valuable and different to learning at school. They agreed work was different to school: 'always on the go', the hours were more demanding and they had to be punctual. While on work experience, students said one of the major things they had learnt was the importance of communication skills with customers and with work mates. The group felt that just being there 'watching it happening' in business was the best way to learn and that in most fields of work that 'you can't learn without being there'.

Students agreed that the order in which they had experienced exposure to work experience as part of the school program was the best way to learn about work. For most, this began with work experience in Year 10, followed by vocational placement and then finding, or being offered, paid part-time work.

Sam said: 'you have the chance to get to know what you want to do, then you know what you want and you learn how. With your part-time work you use a lot of the skills learnt in your work placement'.

They noted that the preparation for work that was undertaken at school during the Work Education subject was beneficial. Practising telephone skills, handling difficult customers and finding out what the company does before going there were some examples cited. In addition, one student said that the 'peer support program run at school helped with customer service' and her communication skills.

When asked how they learned, students said they liked the one-to-one attention they received in workplaces and said they were more motivated because of it. They devised the following list of learning methods they had used in workplaces:

- watched
- moved from section to section
- met as a group for a demo of a new procedure
- used an induction folder
- used a checklist
- a tradesman showed me how
- went to a training session at another store
- watched a training video
- read the safety guidelines
- worked one to one with another worker
- copied other workers

Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

No access difficulties associated with particular groups of students were specifically identified. However, students and teachers did highlight other, general, barriers to accessing their choice of work experience. Some of these barriers were:

- many employers didn't have the time to take on the responsibility of a work-experience placement
- some places were booked out years ahead (for example, graphic design)
- confidentiality in businesses that involved doctor/patient type relationships

Conclusion

The following features emerged at Le Fevre High School:

- the VET co-ordinator and staff were dedicated and had a good rapport with the students. This enthusiasm had an effect on the students
- three of the students interviewed had been offered an apprenticeship as a direct result of work experience or vocational placements
- the number of hours students worked in part-time jobs could have had a detrimental effect on their school work
- the school was unaware of the number of hours some students were spending at part-time jobs
- it was difficult for the students to get the workplace activities that they would have liked (in some cases they were unable to sample their career choice)

- some students took the easy way out and did work experience at their part-time job
- students would have liked their part-time work to have been recognised in some way

Maidstone Boys' School, New South Wales
Erica Smith

Background information

This was an all-boys' school in the inner-west of Sydney. The school had 550 students, but numbers were declining because the area had an ageing population. The students were almost 100 per cent from NESBs, predominantly Asian, Arabic, African, South American and Pacific Islanders. The local government area was the most multicultural in New South Wales. Because of the small student body, teachers appeared to know students as individuals, and the careers teacher had a good knowledge of each student's workplace activities and career plans. Retention rates were around average, with 85 per cent of students completing Year 10 and approximately 65 per cent completing Year 12. Around one-half of Year 12 leavers went to full-time further or higher education.

Research method

Arrangements were made prior to the visit with the deputy principal. A focus group was organised with 11 students from Years 10 and 11; the discussion was taped for transcription. Unfortunately, the retail VET teacher and the deputy principal were not available for interview on the day of the visit, so an interview was only possible with the careers teacher, Gordon, rather than a wider range of teachers. However, Gordon had been with the school for many years, and the in-depth interview was extremely productive. Whilst in the area, a number of local employers were also visited; results of these interviews can be found in this appendix under 'Employer report—Sydney'.

Student focus group

The following students (names have been changed) were present at the focus group. The Year 11 students were all in a retail VET course; the Year 10 students were from a 'transitional education class'—that is, from a lower ability group. All students except one were from a NESB background. An asterisk (*) is used to denote instances where students worked at the same place in their part-time work as in their vocational placement or work experience. The 'note' explains in which capacity they first attended such workplaces.

Name	Year	Work experience	Vocational pl/mt	Paid work	Note
Manny	11	Variety store	Variety store	–	
Jeremy	11	Accountant	Car part retail	–	
Matt	11	Camping store*	Computer store	Camping store*	*Paid work first
Elroy	11	Variety store*	Variety store*	Variety store*	*Paid work first
Hanny	11	Supreme court	Sports store	–	
Marlon	11	Motor mechanic	–	Supermarket	Also sings in a club
Danny	11	Variety store	Variety store	–	
Hiram	10	Hardware store	–	–	
Nerim	10	Supermarket*	–	Supermarket*	*Work exp. first
Prin	10	Smash repairs	–	–	
Ali	10	Mechanic	–	–	

What is the extent and nature of students' experience of the workplace?

The careers teacher said that the families of boys at the school were around the middle of the socioeconomic spectrum. Because they were 'not quite poor enough' for senior students to receive the youth allowance,[46] part-time work was an important source of income for families. He mentioned one Year 12 boy who worked in a fast-food restaurant who had saved $19 000 from his part-time work. He thought that perhaps 50 per cent of the students over the age of 15 had part-time work. The focus group indicated that participation in part-time work may not have been quite so extensive as this, although Year 12 students were absent from the focus group. Two students in the focus group said that they preferred not to work so that they could concentrate on their studies. Other reasons for non-participation, according to Gordon, were parental disapproval, sporting activities, income from the youth allowance, and lack of confidence.

Work experience was mandatary for all Year 10 students; some students also did it in Year 11. The school had not yet experienced any significant difficulties in finding sufficient places for students; some employers were willing to take five or more students at the same time. However, finding places did require 'sensitive co-ordination'. Some workplaces were difficult to access (for paid or unpaid work) because of new OH&S regulations. The school had arranged for students wishing to attend these workplaces to undertake appropriate training at TAFE.

Vocational education courses (which included vocational placements) were becoming popular among students; retailing and furnishings were currently offered, with information technology (IT) and hospitality to be offered the following year. The school regarded such courses as being for non-university-bound students. Part-time work could count in some instances towards their vocational placement hours so long as there was structured training and trained assessors. In addition, a program called Work Studies, with work experience attached, was offered for a group of around 15 students each year; this program was aimed at students who would otherwise be unemployed. These students had individual programs and some attended workplaces every week. Timetabling then became a problem; not only the school but also parents and bus companies had to be inconvenienced.

Nature and relative importance of learning from workplace experiences

Gordon believed that work experience tended to be in different industry areas from students' part-time work. This was not always so; a reasonably common progression was for students to move from work experience to part-time work with the same employer and sometimes onto full-time work in that workplace. However, generally work experience was used to sample career areas (such as accountancy, the law, IT)—to learn about something there would be no other opportunity to learn. Hence Gordon felt that the argument that work experience was redundant for student workers was 'codswallop'. It was interesting to note, however, that in the focus group, over half of the students had work experience in typical 'student worker' environments,[47] although this may have been related to the fact that, since many were undertaking a retail VET course, they may have been looking for a career in retailing anyway. The students had varied responses when asked if work experience was still useful despite their paid work, some agreeing and some disagreeing.

Work experience provided a chance to learn what Gordon described as 'the basics—punctuality, communication skills, working with a boss and peers'. The students felt that work experience taught them 'what it's like to be at work'. When asked for specific things they learned on work experience, the following list was generated by the students: 'Using tools, packing shelves, changing oil, changing tyres, spray painting, using EFTPOS, computer programs'.

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[46] The youth allowance is a fortnightly payment made to young people above school-leaving age who are from low-income families, who wish to continue their schooling. It has replaced 'Austudy'.

[47] In three cases, these were in places where the students also had paid work either before or after the work experience.

One student said that he learned that he didn't like that type of work; another that he didn't learn anything because he already worked in that store. Gordon felt that the nature of work-experience places varied greatly, with some employers having 'it all mapped out', but others less structured. Gordon felt that some employers used an 'apprentice model'—students started off 'sorting the nuts out' and often students did not return after the first day in such workplaces. When asked *how* they learned what to do on work experience, the students' responses indicated that they were most often told and shown by management (either 'the big boss' or a supervisor), by watching other workers—including apprentices—or by teaching themselves.

Paid work, according to Gordon, was 'more structured' and 'the boss is not so patient'. One student echoed this, saying that 'work experience is more easy going' than paid work; another said that 'they weren't hard on you or nothing'. Gordon believed that most part-time work was fairly formal, and tended to be with larger employers who would be likely to have good training systems. The students seemed to prefer paid work to work experience or vocational placements. They felt more secure, they knew their workmates better, and their supervisors paid more attention to them. Although they found their bosses 'scary' at first, they settled down. One student mentioned that he was better trained in his paid work: 'They knew they were going to keep me there for a while, so they trained me'. More was expected of paid workers, and the students saw this as a positive point. One student felt he was regarded as 'more reliable'; another that 'they take you more seriously'.

Those students who had done paid work were very keen for it to be counted towards their Year 12 results, although they had not previously thought about this possibility: 'You want everything to count ... if it's something you are already doing, that's good'. Another student was keen for this to happen because 'Then it wouldn't just be putting things on to paper; you have got the experience, hands on, and could get marked on your hands-on ability as well as theory'; it appeared that he wanted to have his practical skills acknowledged.

Vocational placements, Gordon felt, required much more organisation than work experience. Although Gordon said that 'big business' had approved such vocational placements, he did not expect all workplaces to be able to cope well. He said: 'Some employers are very up to date with what's going on in schools and these programs, and are much more adept in the way they deal with kids on a Voc Ed vocational placement'. The students found some differences between vocational placements and work experience. Those who had done vocational placements (who had already done work experience in retailing), for example, found that in vocational placements they were allowed to operate cash registers. However, one student said of both work experience and his vocational placement: 'it's just slave labour ... they just chuck you somewhere and they don't care what you do'. Interestingly, this student used the same workplace for all of his workplace experiences, leading the researcher to wonder why he had not asked for a different workplace for his structured vocational placement.

Links between school and work were not formalised but were present. There were no formal class opportunities to debrief after work experience and certainly not after paid work, although Gordon talked to many students about both. However, work experience was utilised in curriculum subjects; for example, photography students produced a display of photographs of students on work experience. Gordon thought that teachers regarded work experience as a resource, along with family life, vacations and so on. The students would have liked a little more preparation before they went on work experience, although they claimed they did not feel nervous before work experience. Those who had done vocational placements were well prepared: 'we already knew what we had to do; how to use every bit of equipment before we went'. Interestingly, one student said 'I think the retail course is helping us more than actually going to the job and doing it'. However, another said: 'The difference in writing the things down and doing things physically is very different. You might know everything, but when it comes to hands-on things you can't do it'.

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

Gordon was often pro-active in students' access to part-time work as well as work experience and vocational placements. Local companies often rang him when they needed part-time workers, as well as contacting him when seeking full-time staff. He encouraged students to find their own work experience places and vocational placements but was available to assist.

Gordon said that no students had mentioned discrimination as such, pointing out that the community itself was multicultural; but language skills could create a problem for students in workplaces, although only in the sense that poor English might inhibit students' confidence. Some students' language was sufficient for classroom purposes, but they found workplaces harder to cope with.

Students with language difficulties might be particularly disadvantaged with relation to paid work because so many part-time jobs were in customer service roles. When the area had been predominantly southern European and Middle Eastern, there were more family businesses, so students tended to have work experience or paid work with their families or extended families, but this was less now the nature of the community had changed. However, working with relatives was still a useful path into workplaces for some students, particularly for those with language difficulties.

Less able students were helped to find 'gentler' places for work experience. Several boys had places in non-traditional industries; for example, one boy had gone to *Cleo*, the women's fashion magazine, and several into hairdressing or floristry. Some industries were difficult to access—for example, entertainment and airlines—but access in these cases was not related to the nature of the students.

Conclusion

At Maidstone Boys' School, the following major features emerged:

- the multicultural nature of the student body did not present any significant barriers to accessing work experience, vocational placements or part-time work
- part-time work was undertaken by perhaps half of the students
- it appeared reasonably common for students to attend the same workplace for each type of workplace experience; however, these students appeared less satisfied with their workplace activities than those who attended different workplaces
- some students used work experience as a form of career sampling, but others did not
- access to preferred workplaces was not always available owing to the nature of the work or OH&S issues
- students were not very focussed on learning in workplaces
- students would like their part-time work to be recognised in some way
- a pro-active and experienced careers teacher had a highly beneficial effect on students' interactions with workplaces

Murray Bridge High School, South Australia

Steve Keirl

Background information

Murray Bridge High was in a rural city of 17 000 people, situated 80 kilometres from Adelaide. A significant change in recent years had seen the community profile moving from that of a rural centre to one with increasing industrial activity and as a service centre. Murray Bridge was expected to grow for at least the next 5–10 years—with considerable economic development particularly focussing on irrigation—with a resulting creation of new jobs. There had been changes in the social mix of the community as urban migration to the area continued.

The school was one of the largest country secondary schools in South Australia, catering for a diverse mix of students. A significant number of students travelled by school bus from outlying districts. Enrolment had declined slowly over the past ten years, although this trend was expected to reverse and stabilise, with currently 862 students enrolled. Approximately 39 per cent were 'on school card', signifying low income. There were also significant numbers of students from NESBs, including Turkish, Arabic, Italian and South-East Asian. There were 42 Aboriginal students, whose special needs are being addressed in a number of ways. For

2000, the enrolment in Year 10 was 163, in Year 11, 147 and in Year 12 there were 95 students. The school was considered as having a high level of academic achievement.

Research method

By arrangement with the school, three focus groups were convened. There were two student groups (a Year 10 group with five students and a Year 11 group with three) and one group of three staff. Numbers of participants were somewhat lower than anticipated. The focus groups took a semi-structured form with exploratory questions being developed as needed. All participants were most willing to co-operate fully and explore issues.

Student focus group

The table shows the nature of the work experiences undertaken by the eight students interviewed. All names are pseudonyms. Although none was able to report on a vocational placement, the teacher group was able to report fully on such placements.

Teacher focus group

This group of three comprised two teachers and a 'trainer'—a member of the local composite/plastics industry providing school/industry program liaison.

Name	Year	Work experience	Vocational placement	Paid work	Comments
Ahmed	10	Retail (second-hand goods)	–	–	
Bill	10	Farm work	–	Farmwork—milking	Two different farms—each owned by relatives
Michelle	10	Dental practice	–	Fast food	
Paula	10	Gym	–	Swimming coach	Lifesaver training
Roseanne	10	Hairdressing	–	Hairdressing Fast-food outlet	
Mark	11	Architecture (in Adelaide)	–	Supermarket (night filler)	
Peter	11	Sports store	–	Petrol station	
Rick	11	Radio station Gym	–	Supermarket (night filler)	

What is the extent and nature of the way in which school students in Years 10, 11 and 12 experience the workplace?

Work experience at Murray Bridge High was a compulsory component of Work Education, a semester-long subject as a part of the South Australian Certificate of Education (Stage One). The program included preparation for work experience and resulted in the production of a portfolio. In deciding on a location, students considered possible career pathways and used the work experience to 'try out' the pathway or setting. Students' strategies for accessing workplaces varied. Some used the *Yellow Pages*, while others used a relative or friend. Some students opted for work experience in a field that was unfamiliar, while others opted for a family business. Most stayed within the immediate area for work experience, although a few travelled further afield. It was considered by teachers to be extremely rare in work-experience programs either to receive negative reports from employers or to witness the withdrawal of

students. In Year 12, students were allowed to use work activities (including work experience, vocational placements and part-time work) for their SACE subjects. These activities were used as tools for researching their school subjects or projects. Students could negotiate for hours of credit that they wished to obtain.

Murray Bridge High School placed a large emphasis on vocational education in its curriculum and was an active member of its local vocational education Enterprise Cluster of schools. Vocational education was seen as assisting students, particularly those categorised as 'at risk', in gaining employment; and in increasing retention to Year 12. Thus vocational placements were an important and growing part of senior school life at Murray Bridge. In Year 11, vocational placements existed, for example, in the Irrigation Pathway, a specific course flowing into that industry. Similar placements existed in the metal, automotive, engineering, sheet-metal, sales, and polymers processing fields. There was also a Community Health Industry Partnerships (CHIPS) program in child and aged care. Some of these programs were stand-alone and were apart from the school's VET programs in which up to four subjects per year may be taken as part of SACE. These courses included sport and recreation, hospitality, retail, horse management, business and drama. One student was undertaking a school-based traineeship. Some placements were undertaken in Adelaide, 80 kilometres away, while others were local.

Teachers considered that perhaps 40–50 per cent of students had paid part-time work but that such work included occasional work, as well as formal work; for example, babysitting or seasonal work such as produce picking or shelf-stacking at Christmas. It was not uncommon for students to be working for 30 hours per week in addition to their school and sporting or cultural commitments. Hours of work for the students in the focus group ranged from ten hours a week to a regular 20 hours (in the case of Roseanne). Vacation work might involve longer hours. Teachers and students alike felt that there was not enough recognition of part-time work done by the students.

Some general comments were made about the nature of the way in which school students experienced workplaces. The Year 11 students felt that there were not any significant differences between the types of work activities made available to them. They found them similarly useful, with some providing experiences that school could not provide—although, as one student commented when referring to his work experience alongside accountants and office staff, there was 'nothing new that wasn't learned at school'. Also, at the general level, teachers felt that it was most important that employers appreciate and value the programs being designed and undertaken in order for the students to gain maximum learning.

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

The students and teachers voiced two broad aspects of learning, respectively. Students found, possibly as a result of the school's multi-stranded approach to providing work experiences, that they were able to use their workplace experiences to help them in career choices. Teachers commented that it was also the case that, whatever the work setting, students' self-esteem grows as willing employers 'give them a go'.

Teachers explained that in Year 10, students learned how to go about getting a job—the canvassing process. Teachers suggested that in one week students may not learn a skill but, rather:

- how the workplace functions
- appropriate behaviours
- appropriate dress
- understanding the range of tasks involved in a job
- to judge the desirability, or otherwise, of a job

By contrast, in a Year 11 vocational placement specific skills and duties were assessed. Work ethic, punctuality and attendance were highly valued. Having attained a certificate, for example in OHS&W, was recognised as useful and having Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) value for further education. Similarly, the more VET modules attained, the easier the pathway into TAFE and industry. As one teacher put it, 'the generics can be got out of the way to allow for work to start on the specifics such as skills, terminology and OHS&W'.

Students were able to mention particular industry-specific skills that they had learned, including the repair and maintenance of golf equipment, soil-selection, stripping down a baling machine, using specialised jigs in the plastic-forming industry, and observing radio program production. However, it was more difficult for them to differentiate between the learning gained in the various environments. Students mentioned that they learned a lot about workplaces from their in-school education. However, the 'bigger picture' and contextualisation of their learning could be gained in the workplaces, and this was a dimension that could not always be (re)created in school.

Students felt that there were no especial surprises in store for them in the workplace, as they had been well prepared at school. All students found work-experience mentors helpful in their use of demonstration and conversation as instructional support strategies—this resulting from their school-based preparation. Students noted that requirements varied between different employers and that generic skills were not as generic as might be imagined. At a simple level, 'appropriate dress' meant different things in different settings; it might relate to cultural and social acceptability or to OH&S requirements. At another level, as one student pointed out, her experience of what the dentist she was working with considered 'people skills' were 'quite different' from those expected from her fast-food industry employer.

Teachers noted that organisations which were part of larger national enterprises such as the supermarket, fast-food outlet and petrol station each had standardised training programs. These, variously, comprised use of training videos, mentor, crew trainer, buddy system, learning booth, hands-on and observation. One-to-one training, supervised activity, or 'being shown the ropes' were common approaches in many settings. Where and when possible, students on vocational placements were allowed to work unsupervised and develop some competencies. In other situations, for reasons such as client confidentiality, equipment value and complexity, supervisory staff time availability, or OHS&W, students' experiences were limited. In some settings, students were asked to 'go and watch another video' if a competency had not been attained.

Teachers complained that some employers did not understand competency-based training and assessment very well, which created difficulties in vocational placements. They were continuing to work with employers on this issue. Finally, teachers pointed out that employers learned too. There had been instances where students brought new ideas and even knowledge that an employer did not have; for example in computing.

Are there variations in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

No difficulty was reported which related to particular equity groups. However, the teachers did highlight a range of barriers they perceive as inhibitors for access. These can be divided into those pertaining to students and those pertaining to employers. Those relating to students included:

- rurality issues—accessing suitable placements and work experience
- students' self-created barriers such as poor dress or communication
- family influences, particularly where institutionalised unemployment may exist, which dissuade students from pursuing work
- peer pressure to not take a job or to not dress appropriately
- some students think that doors are closed to them

Those relating to specific industries or employers included:

- small business owner–operators were too busy to look after students
- where a specific skill level was required, only observation was allowed; for example, cheese-making or in the plastics industry
- ethics and confidentiality in some workplaces
- some employers regarding teachers as being 'out of touch'
- interstate reciprocal arrangements barring transfer of credentials

What effects do such experiences of the workplace have on later access to employment and higher education?

Teachers commented on the role that any of the work-based experiences can play for students' future pathways. They thought that VET modules and generic modules such as OH&S could help students along pathways in TAFE and tertiary education. Generally, the more modules attained, the better the prospects for further study. With regard to employment, teachers felt that employment lists could be short-circuited and agencies avoided following experience and prior learning in the workplace.

Summary

There was clearly a good relationship between the school, the employers and the community, and there was a strong and valued culture of work experience. The students did not make any clear differentiation between their workplace activities and school learning. They believed that school subjects prepared them effectively for the workplace, and they did not express any belief that workplace learning was particularly more authentic or useful.

Motivation appeared to be central to effective learning. Where a career pathway was clear to a student, then the motivation of workplace experience is high. Without such a pathway in mind, however, students still gained understanding of workplaces that were likely to be of value to them in their transition from school. As with good teachers, the workplace mentors most valued were those who gave time to engage with the students at some kind of personal level as well as giving them appropriate independence to take charge of their learning and actions.

Plains Central School, New South Wales

Annette Green

Background information

Plains Central School was located in a small town of 1200 people in a fairly remote rural region in New South Wales where the main industries included agriculture, particularly cattle and, more recently, cotton. The school was a Central School, meaning it had students from kindergarten through to Year 12. There were 230 students at the school, of which around 110 were of secondary school age.

Research method

All arrangements were made with the Principal initially. The Principal was enthusiastic about the school's participation partly because of her personal beliefs about the importance of providing opportunities for VET in a rural and remote school. The school's community liaison officer (CLO) assisted with the case study and also with the employer interviews (reported in this appendix under 'Employer report—Plains'. The small size of both the school and local community limited the numbers of available participants, but consultation and discussion ensured representation was the best available. The student and staff groups were convened separately, and the discussions taped for transcription.

Student focus group

This consisted of six students from Years 10 and 11. They were of mixed academic ability and gender, and all had experienced at least two of the three domains: work experiences, vocational placement and part-time work. All had been involved in at least two weeks of work experience while in Year 10.

Staff focus group

The staff group was made up of the Principal, the careers adviser and the CLO. These will be referred to in the case study by their roles. The Principal and CLO were female and the careers adviser was male.

Name (pseudonym)	Year	Work experience	Vocational placement	Paid work	Comments
Russ	10	Car mechanic Farmhand Cook	–	Farm work	Aiming to leave after Year 10
Paul	10	Drama assistant (3 sites)	–	Hardware store assistant	
Susie	10	Housekeeper Food preparation	–	Café worker	
Clare	10	Supermarket Library Shire council Aged care Preschool	–	–	Aiming to leave after Year 10
Lisa	11	Interior decoration Speech pathology Occupational therapy	Solicitor's office	–	
Tessa	11	Paediatrician Pathologist	Hospital admissions	–	

What is the extent and nature of students' experience of the workplace?

Work experience was given high priority by both staff and students, all appearing to discuss work experience rather than vocational placements or paid work. All students were offered a two-week work experience in Year 10, with some students completing extra work-experience periods. These included students who were not achieving well or who were contemplating leaving at the end of Year 10. The two-week experience often involved two positions: students are encouraged to select one place which was in the area they were considering as a potential job, and the other as a more experimental 'taste' of a different career choice. The six students in the focus group had experienced many career options, covering an extensive range of occupations over a number of sites and locations, reflecting the enthusiasm brought in the school to setting up work experience. The value attributed to work experience meant that it was very well implemented and supported.

Work experience was seen as an opportunity to observe careers not available in such a small town, as well as to give a valuable life experience:

> *I think one of the biggest things they learn is that there's life beyond Plains. They experience the different lifestyles. They also broaden their understandings of what occupations are available. I think they're the two biggest things.* (Principal)

Many students travelled to other areas, and the school supported accommodation and travel where necessary. Family and teacher networks were used for accommodation, including arranging billets. All students commented on the amount of time and trouble the CLO took with arranging placements, accommodation and travel for them. There was an attempt to place students who were perceived to be unlikely to have an opportunity to travel outside the local area in larger regional centres:

> *One of them that springs to mind lives out in the scrub there—60k out … he's in Newcastle (on work experience). I mean it was a real eye opener (for him) just to be in a different environment.* (Careers teacher)

Before work experience, the CLO and the careers teacher planned an extended focus on career options and opportunities for work experience, accompanied by individual interviews and consultations. Work experience was very well documented, with each student building up documentation on each work experience to form a portfolio that could be used as an

additional reference when applying for jobs. Students were proud of these portfolios, which included basic protocols and expectations about work, a work journal or diary, and reports and comments from employers.

When comparing the three potential modes of work that may be experienced by students, the CLO commented:

> *I just think that each of the three of them have a place and they all have a different purpose and there is some talk of getting rid of work experience because of the burden on employers and I think it would be a shame to see it go … it serves a purpose and that purpose is very different to work placement and certainly different to paid employment.* (CLO)

Students had experienced a variety of paid work, but some had not had jobs, citing isolation, transport and lack of opportunities as the reasons. One student in the focus group said she had not looked for a job because she could not find work in the career area she was aiming for:

> *The work that I'd be interested in doing I can't really do anything because its … like a uni course so I can't really work for that.* (Lisa, who wanted to be a speech pathologist)

As well as weekend and after-school work, there was a lot of seasonal work available in the area, particularly over the Christmas school holidays. This work included orange picking, cotton chipping and work connected with irrigation farming.

There was some crossover between the different types of workplace activities. One student had gained work as a farmhand at weekends as a direct result of work experience. Another student, after enjoying working at an aged care facility on work experience, was working there on call as a volunteer with the hope of making this a full-time career:

> *When I'm doing voluntary work, it's getting me in there so they know what I'm like.* (Clare)

Clare had also begun to investigate the further study options in this field with the TAFE college in the next town.

Nature and relative importance of learning from workplace experiences

The students saw learning from work experience as very different from learning at school. The students cited learning about communication with other people as a key difference. The aim of giving students broader views was obviously achieved for one student, who said:

> *The biggest thing that I learnt is the amount of skill that everyone else had in the city and I think people in the city have more experience.* (Paul)

Such skills included using public transport, reading maps and finding locations. Staff thought that opening students' eyes to possible career options was a major learning point, particularly because students might think the limited job options in Plains were all that were available to them. Staff were aware that students might leave school for casual or unskilled full-time jobs without realising their full potential. Interestingly, teachers placed less emphasis on learning from work experience than the students, who seemed to value it very highly. The careers teacher said:

> *In work experience they really can't get in there and do too much work. They can get a taste of what's going on—the employer's not going to give them important things to do so from that point of view they're getting the easy part of the job.*

Students said that at the workplace they learned by observing other staff and by having an expert staff member demonstrating tasks:

> *While they're doing something they'll explain it to you like … this is what I'm doing and this is why I'm doing it.* (Lisa)

They enjoyed interacting with, and being taken seriously by, adult co-workers:

> *You get treated like an adult no matter how immature you are because they don't really know you so...* (Lisa)

It seemed that they were able to escape from the history they might have accumulated at the school and to be viewed purely on the merits of their current performance.

Students identified both one-to-one communication and contextualisation of learning as the two key factors that they found differentiated learning on work experience from learning at school. Instruction was not interrupted by the needs of other learners, as it might be at school:

> *They're trying to get across to the one person that's there so if that one person there doesn't know what you're talking about then they can put it across in another sort of direction without putting somebody else off.* (Susie)

They felt motivated to learn, as they knew that learning would be immediately applied, and they understood the importance of getting it right in an immediate and real way.

Improved motivation appeared to carry over to school. Students said that once they were more focussed on a career they potentially wanted to engage in, they were able to select appropriate subjects more easily and feel as if they had a goal to work towards:

> *It almost helps you in school as well because I wasn't really sure all last year ... what I wanted to do and after doing work experience I sort of ... decided that that's what I want to do, and now I've kinda got something to aim for ... so it motivates me in school as well.* (Tessa)

Susie said that working hard for long hours—in her case making 50 beds a day—made her appreciate school more, and there was a general agreement with this comment.

It was evident that the school spent a lot of time preparing students for work experience and that students appreciated this. However, the school clearly realised that there was a limit to the amount of curriculum time that could and should be devoted to such activities:

> *I think we also basically have to realise that schools were set up to educate children in all sorts of areas and if we go beyond the point that we've already gone in using schools to train kids for the work placement I think we're losing a lot of what education is all about.* (Principal)

Students seemed less enthusiastic about vocational placements, which seemed to lack the novelty value and charm of distant locations offered with work experience. Although they noted that they learned new skills and how to operate equipment that they had practised on at school, they were not overly excited about their placements:

> *In the work experience I think its more like ... kind of interesting because the people are there to like ... get you interested in the job, but work placement is like ... you have to be able to do this so there are certain things that you have to know how to do.* (Lisa)

Students also complained that they had little choice of host employer, compared to work experience. In general, there was a feeling that there was more pressure, more repetition and less choice and fun in the vocational placement. The students also appeared a little confused about their vocational placements and how they fitted into their VET courses. The programs did not appear, to them, to be as well organised as the work-experience programs, possibly because they were much newer and also because TAFE was also involved in the process.

The students appeared to believe that learning from paid jobs was minimal, as the tasks were often repetitive and fairly easily mastered:

> *You learn what you have to do and you keep on doing it every weekend and every now and again they'll just show you the new things but ... it doesn't keep on going.* (Paul)

It was taken for granted that to earn a wage, directions must be followed without question to retain the position:

> *Where I done one work experience and I went back there, private (paid work) was different cause work experience I did something wrong he'd tell me what I did, when I was out private he'd swear and curse.* (Russ)

In some cases, the students had already known some of the skills involved in their paid work. Russ, discussing his paid farm work, said: 'I already know how to do it ... like ... I go out lamb marking with me uncle'.

Teachers saw the most valuable learning involved in part-time work as the acquiring of generic work skills:

> *I think they learn things like punctuality and responsibility to the employer, and turning up every day, because around here they are long hours and under very difficult conditions at times, and if they don't come up to it, then they're kicked out very quickly—so they do learn those sort of skills which aren't part of work placement or work experience ... not really.* (CLO)

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

Most of the access and equity issues here were centred on the isolated rural nature of the school. There were only a small number of businesses and work opportunities in the town. Finding placements for students had been improved this year by the creating of cluster arrangements with other small schools in the district. This has provided access to a work placement co-ordinator. The maintenance and funding of these positions, and continuation of these arrangements in the future, was of concern to the staff. They were also concerned that employers were being asked to do too much in offering vocational placements as well as work experience and that the requirements for formal assessment of competencies might increase that burden. The careers teacher worried that all the effort was on the side of the employer: 'There's nothing that we're really offering them apart from the opportunity to pick up good kids who could be potential employees'.

There was also a feeling among teachers that VET subjects in isolated areas should be introduced before the post-compulsory years, as Year 11 was too late for many students, especially the males. The CLO felt that boys might be prevented from leaving at the end of Year 10 if they could be introduced to 'trades' during Year 10. There seemed to be an opinion that part-time work for boys could actually be counter-productive, as it might lure students into leaving school early for jobs which had no training pathways or stability.

Conclusion

Students relished aspects of the world of work which emphasise new experiences and opportunities, being taken seriously by adults and learning in context. Where the work was much more structured and/or repetitive, as in both paid work and vocational placements, it was less enthusiastically undertaken. Staff concurred with students that work experience provides a fun taste of various work options compared with the serious and assessable nature of vocational placements. Implementation issues caused the most difficulties for the school; organising students to go to other districts for two weeks for work experience, arranging transport and workplaces for vocational placements, and transporting VET students to a TAFE situated over an hour away by bus were just some of the challenges this school has met. However, the positive views expressed by the students themselves about the opportunities for vocational learning through the school attest to the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and the support of local employers where they can. This school exemplified the fact that the key factor in success of integrating vocational learning into schools is the enthusiasm and support of key staff members, in particular the principal. The major concern of staff members appeared to be that students finish their school education with the maximum opportunity to go into work, or further study that would lead to satisfying careers, and their opinions about the value of different workplace activities were underpinned by this concern.

Treedera High School

Annette Green and Ros Brennan

Background information

Treedera School was located in regional New South Wales. The school had a total of 335 students. It was the only secondary school in this town of around 5000 people, which also had a TAFE college. There was a large Aboriginal population locally.

Research method

All arrangements were made with the Principal, initially. The Principal was quite enthusiastic about the school's participation in the research project, as he was committed to VET in rural schools. The careers teacher assisted with both the school case study and the employer interviews (which are reported in this appendix under the tile 'Employer report—Treedera). Student and teacher focus groups were interviewed separately.

Student focus group

The following table shows the make-up of the student focus group. All names are pseudonyms.

Name	Year	Work experience	Vocational placement	Paid work	Special notes
Jeremy	11	Hospital Primary school	Town council (IT course)	Kitchen hand General store (family business)	Very academic—aims to be a doctor
Jane	11	VET surgery Hospital	Hotel (Hospitality course)	Truck stop / diner	
Eloise	11	Childcare	Coffee shop (Hospitality course)	Coffee shop	Got part-time job through vocational placement
Aidan	11	Primary school Police station	Bed and breakfast (Hospitality course)	Service station Hotel	
Walter	11	Primary school Sports store Furniture shop Sports centre	Department store (Retail course)	–	Aboriginal student

Teacher focus group

Four teachers were involved in this group. Some details are given in the table below.

Name (pseudonym)	Role	Comments
Paul	Principal	Former maths teacher Very interested in VET
Gerald	Careers adviser	VET enthusiast who has actively promoted and supported VET programs since started at school
Hayley	VET co-ordinator	Industry (business) background TAFE teacher Former TRAC co-ordinator Very committed to VET
Belinda	TAFE VET teacher	Experienced and enthusiastic about VET-in-Schools and links with TAFE

What is the extent and nature of the way in which Year 10, 11 and 12 school students experience the workplace?

All school work-experience and vocational-placement arrangements were organised by the careers teacher and VET co-ordinator collaboratively. Most were arranged in the local area so that it was easy for the school assessors to arrange visits.

Work experience consisted, for all students, of two blocks of one week in Year 10 at different employers. It was organised by the school but student preferences were collected first. In a small town, there were 'more kids than employers', which led to problems when organising work experience. The students said that when the whole of Year 10 had to be placed for work

experience, many students had a limited choice and ended up working in industries or workplaces that did not interest them. However, with vocational placement, because there are only a few students, all of them were placed in relevant workplaces in jobs they really wanted. As well as the limited number of local workplaces, the nature of workplaces was also a difficulty. Local businesses tended to be small and were not always able to provide students with a range of activities to keep them interested. The example given was the local supermarkets that could not compare to a major Woolworth's store, but the nearest Woolworth's was 100 kilometres away. The technological capacity of local employers also limited the types of experiences students had. Often these small businesses did not warrant automation or advanced information technology systems, yet this was the type of experience many students were looking for. The local TAFE college was also competing with the school for work experience and vocational placements. Attached to these barriers was the cost and practicality of sending students away for work experience or VET courses. There was no public transport to get to a major centre, so parents had to be prepared to meet the costs of daily private vehicle transport.

The school believed that around 45–50 per cent of Year 10 to 12 students had part-time work. Of the focus group, one student had secured her part-time work through family connections, one as a direct result of her VET vocational placement, and the other had her part-time work prior to starting her VET course but felt that the VET course improved her skills and performance in her paid job. Of the two boys, neither had a paid part-time job; one because he wanted to concentrate on school and the other because he lived out of Narrandera and often worked in his parents' business.

Treedera High School had a very high enrolment in VET subjects; for example in 2000, around 85 per cent of Year 11 students were doing VET subjects. All of these students participated in vocational placements, which consisted of a five-day block at the end of Year 11. Most of the VET subjects were offered in an arrangement with the local TAFE college. Subjects offered either through TAFE or in other partnerships included Tourism & Hospitality, Retail, Metals & Engineering, Child Studies, Primary Industries, and IT. The teacher group felt that increased confidence was the major benefit of placements. Students were delighted that they could 'see the concrete results of what they've learnt ... (and say to an employer) ... yes, I am competent in doing these things'.

What is the nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences?

All students felt that all their work experience had taught them how to deal with, respond to, communicate with, and handle, other people. For many it involved customer service, but for others it was dealing with children and fellow workers. In learning how to function in work experience the students watched fellow workers, although they also had to figure out how to do tasks themselves, as they were 'thrown in the deep end' and had a fair idea of what was appropriate already. The students said that 'theory's boring' and 'hands on' experience was the best way to learn new things. Having a range of tasks and different things to do was also important in keeping the students interested and motivated. One comment was 'I was very excited ... as there was something new to do every day'.

As part of the Year 10 work-experience program from 2001, all students would undertake a nationally accredited training course in OH&S.

Learning in vocational placements, in the past, had been hindered by the fact that students were not 'work ready', and this affected their performance in their placements. To overcome this problem, the school had initiated an orientation/induction program for VET students. This program ran for one full day, and students learned about their responsibility to turn up to work, to be on time, and about appropriate standards of dress and general behaviour. As part of this program, the involved employers were present as guest speakers to talk about work to students and also so that students would have an opportunity to 'practise' talking to employers. Teachers also noted that many of the local employers involved in VET-in-Schools nominated a contact person who developed a training plan specifically for their students based on the competencies that have to be achieved. This gave staff experience in doing training plans that cover all facets of the business's operation and in training their existing staff in workplace training. Interestingly, teachers believed that similar processes were not carried out for paid workers.

Most students felt there was little, if any, connection between school and the vocational placement, 'what you do in and out of school are different'. Overwhelmingly, the teacher group focussed on the practical, real-life skills that the students learnt in their workplaces. They also highlighted the fact that in these situations, students became more responsible for their own learning, as they 'were treated like adults'. They (often) did not have to wear a uniform, there was no bell ringing regimentation, it was more relaxed, and they were motivated to learn as what they were doing was related to 'everyday life'.

The teachers in the focus group wanted a co-ordinated effort between themselves and the teachers involved in 'academic' subjects to make the links between practical and academic knowledge. For example, the VET teachers should be explicit in showing the maths involved in the retail, hospitality and business strands, and maths teachers should be explicit in showing how the theoretical manifests itself in day-to-day life. By showing the relevance of theory and practice, the enthusiasm and enjoyment that students get from VET courses could be channelled into the broader school curriculum. Students could 'see the benefits, once they start doing the Voc Ed courses, they can see ... "Oh, I really do need my maths!"'.

Some barriers to learning in work experience and vocational placements were identified by the students. These included:

- the quality of workplace supervision: one student had an experience where her supervisor 'explained the things she didn't need to ... [and] ... didn't explain the things she needed to'.
- some had employers that encouraged questioning, while others found it more difficult to ask questions at work than it was at school

Most students had different impressions of their learning in each type of workplace activity. One student felt that she worked harder at her paid job because 'payment is an incentive'. Being given responsibility was also an issue raised by one student. He felt that he was more motivated to learn in his paid job because his employer 'showed trust' in him. Others felt that all their experiences were similar in that they were all 'active' and involved interesting tasks. The difference between VET vocational placement and work experience was emphasised by teachers in that work experience was seen to involve observation and vocational placement was seen as actually doing the job with associated responsibility. Most students felt that their VET vocational placement was different to work experience in that work experience involved doing the 'scabby jobs' and vocational placements involved 'actually working' and being treated like a real member of staff.

When students were asked if they wanted recognition for what they had learned in their part-time jobs, they commented that they had never thought about making the link between the two experiences. Jeremy used his work in his father's business on the computer at home for his assessments. Another student explained that when VET was first introduced, she was told that if you had a part-time job, your hours could be counted and assessments done at that site, but that process did not appear to be in place.

In exploring how recognition of part-time work could be carried out, the students thought that a logbook similar to that used in the vocational placement could be given to their employers for them to 'tick off'. However, they were aware of possible quality-control difficulties. They felt that personal bias might intrude; and that an employer might not be qualified to assess. They also identified that the extra organisation and workload for the workplace supervisor and the TAFE co-ordinator might be a burden.

Teachers felt that once initially trained in their paid work, students did the same tasks over and over again, and they became automatic. With a structured VET vocational placement where there were assessable competencies to be achieved students were 'more aware of what they were doing' and, so, were more reflective about their learning and experiences. In order to compensate for the perceived lack of learning opportunities in students' part-time work, for those students doing the Hospitality VET course who already had paid work in local cafes, coffee shops, truck stops and fast-food businesses, the school tried to place them in different work environments. This means organising vocational placements at the hospital, nursing homes, hotels, motels and restaurants. While they were learning similar skills—customer service, food service, hygiene etc.—they are also exposed to very different workplace environments in order to realise that there are 'better opportunities' within that industry.

Are there variations in the way in which different equity groups access these experiences and learning?

No comments were made by any participants on this topic even though one of the students was an Aboriginal student.

Effects of workplace experiences on subsequent employment and access to higher education

All students felt that work experience was valuable in their future career planning. However, the way in which it did so could be negative as well as positive; sometimes after work experience they definitely knew what they did not want to do and began planning from there. One student felt he wanted to do anything in the medical field, but he said: 'after one week at the hospital I definitely don't want to be a nurse' and was now aiming to be a doctor.

Conclusion

At Treedera High School the following major features emerged:

- partnership between the school and the employers appeared vital to the success of both work-experience and vocational placement opportunities
- one of the major barriers to work, work experience and vocational placements is the small number of employers easily accessible to the students
- the small scale of the businesses restricts the opportunities to students to participate in a wide range of learning and employment contexts
- the range of VET courses available at the local TAFE was also a limitation for school students seeking placements
- teachers had identified that students were not work ready and had implemented a program to address this perceived problem
- students felt there was little connection between the learning that takes place at school and their learning at work
- teachers and students alike made a clear distinction between work experience and vocational placements, although the careers teacher commented that he believed that the latter was 'improving' work-experience practices

Year 12 students focus group, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales

Annette Green

Background information

Seven Year 12 students from four secondary schools in and near Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, were invited to participate in a discussion on their experiences and learning in workplace activities. The group was convened because of the under-representation of Year 12 students in other phases of the study. The focus group was held in December 2000, after HSC exams were completed, as all the students were candidates. As it happened, the discussion took place on the evening of the day on which many had got their results, and two of the group had scored university admission scores in the 90s. Some were not aware of, or chose not to discuss, their results.

Research method

The focus group was recruited through personal contacts and was held in a researcher's home. Some of the group had seen the survey, and one had filled in a questionnaire, so, very little was required in terms of background discussion. The group represented mixed academic abilities, and nearly all had experienced at least two of the three domains: work experience, vocational placement and paid part-time work.

What is the extent and nature of students' experience of the workplace?

None had found any real barriers to gaining work experience of their choice. They generally found their places themselves, but the various schools assisted in the final arrangements. Hilda had sought a Sydney placement in order to pursue her dream of becoming a dress designer, and had followed this through her choices after Year 10, even changing schools to allow more opportunities in clothing design, manufacture and management. Alice, on the other hand, found her work experience at a butcher completely dissuaded her from following this as a career, and now had no clear career options. For Tom, working with archives in a library put him off library work as a career. Sue had missed the opportunity of work experience through the school but had arranged to work as a volunteer at the aged care home, where her mother worked, specifically to gain experience in the work place. Fern's work experience at a hairdresser confirmed she would pursue this career in the future.

Vocational placements were organised completely by the schools. Adam quite enjoyed working with computers in a high school in the next town but was initially disappointed not to gain a position in a computer shop. However, he did benefit from the experience. The local work placement co-ordination agency had been flooded with IT students, and the decision to place students in schools wherever possible was made because this was one of the few venues where networked computers could be accessed.

Paid part-time work was limited by transport in most cases. Those who had licences and access to a car were very much advantaged. Those living in the smaller rural towns found access to work particularly difficult, and Fern and Tom were considered very fortunate finding jobs in the supermarket and garage in a small centre. Sue found she was underpaid when she worked in a dress shop in a small town, and she believed that it was easy for the owner to take advantage of the lack of opportunity for paid work locally by offering minimal wages. On one occasion Sue had worked full time for $50 per week. She did not stay very long, commenting that the turnover of part-time workers at this shop was high. Alice had chosen to work locally, as the petrol costs of getting to a larger centre made the money earned 'not worth the effort' and there were no opportunities for work in her local area. It was interesting that none of this group had worked for major employers such as the fast-food chains or the large retailers.

Pseudo-nym	Year	Work experience	Vocational placement	Paid work	Other & post-school destination
Ruby	12	Clerical	No	Waiting; kitchenhand	Unpaid work on family farm Plans: University (IT)
Sue	12	–	–	Fast food; dress shop	Volunteer work in aged care No plans
Hilda	12	Dress design studio	Accountants	Parent's shop	Plans: Further study (Management/design)
Alice	12	Butchers	No	Domestic	No plans
Adam	12	Grape pruning	High school for IT VET course	Own market stall; bakery	Plans: University (Hospitality management)
Fern	12	Hairdressing	Boarding school facility Cafe	Babysitting; supermarket checkout	Plans: Hairdressing
Tom	12	Library	No	Fruit picking Garage hand	Plans: University

Nature and relative importance of learning from workplace experiences

The group agreed with Adam's opening statement in the discussion on learning from work that 'School doesn't teach you anything about work'. They discussed the fact that most of the schools subjects had not been applied to real life, or they had not been able to see relevance in many of their academic subjects. They felt school could have been more relevant by teaching skills such as communication, and by placing much more emphasis on career education, which the group judged very inadequate. In particular, there was a feeling that careers education did not teach students about the actual work content of jobs. Hilda would have liked to have seen more opportunities for work experience. She believed that students were too young in Year 10 to be trusted as a worker, and thought there would be more opportunities if work experience was included during senior years. However, this may have related to the specialised area (fashion design) in which she had sought experience.

The main learning gained from workplace activities was identified as communication skills. They also noted the need to use initiative:

You have to work by yourself, like you don't get constantly told what to do. (Sue)

The group felt this increased the sense of responsibility and worth attributed to them, especially compared with school. When asked about how the learning may have differed between different arrangements, students expressed the view that most was learned in paid work:

In paid work, they expect you to go off, they don't want to help you all the time. That's why they pay you. (Ruby)

In work experience, much less learning was identified, as there was no opportunity to work in an unsupervised way, and there was less opportunity to gain actual practical skills because of the lack of hands-on opportunities.

There was some discussion of links between school and vocational placements. Fern pointed out that her VET course in hospitality equipped her very well for her vocational placement, although she identified knife skills as one part of the on-the-job training that taught her quite a lot. Adam found that what he did in his vocational placement was very different to what he had been studying at TAFE in his IT course:

At the work placement, we did all hands-on sort of stuff, like building computers, so it was completely different. (Adam)

The discussion then moved to what assisted or inhibited learning in the workplace. Fern pointed out that in her learning knife skills, the chef showed her how he used knives, then showed her how to increase her efficiency and speed, then gave her opportunities to practice with his guidance. Although she did not become very quick, she believes she had mastered the techniques and would increase her efficiency with more time to practice. Others believed that you learned because you had to do it; for example, Sue increased her ability to communicate with customers because she was put in a situation where she had to communicate with customers—there was no choice.

In his paid job, Adam had participated in work meetings where the workers were shown very explicitly the accepted operation practices and communication style of the busy bakery where he worked part time:

We have meetings where they say ... we want you to greet the customers like this; we want you to go to the counter before they even get to the counter. (Adam)

He believed the learning was encouraged by the fact that there was a pool of casuals who would replace other workers if they did not comply and learn immediately. He also discussed the pressure; for example, in the bakery section staff assume he will be able to do things because he has worked on the counter for a while. Questions were discouraged because of the pressure to keep up with demand. When asked how they might cope with the assumption that they already know how to do things they may not, it was thought that:

You do it how you think, and then you wait for them to yell at you. (Hilda)

They felt that in paid work, often other staff or management were too busy to ask. Most agreed they tended to ask other teenage workers rather than disturbing the boss. Tom

emphasised that in his garage job, the supervisor gave him a list of instructions, then often left him for a call-out and he had to figure out how to do these tasks by himself.

When comparing learning at work with learning at school, one participant pointed out that the school system could pick up on the benefit of personal responsibility that aided some of the learning in the workplace:

> *At work, you learn to work for yourself and by yourself, so if you applied that at school, I think you would learn more at school and be more focussed.* (Sue)

One participant thought that school did not recognise part-time work as important or relevant. He was continually explaining that he was not available at out-of-school-hours events because of his work commitments.

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

Other than disadvantages associated with rural location—stemming from lack of transport and limited work opportunities—this group did not identify any issues relating to access and equity.

Conclusion

The group felt experience in the workplace was vital both to assist in making decisions about future careers and to show what was really involved in various work places. They also believed that these experiences were very important in seeking further or future employment, either part time or full time, as experience was often requested. The group, as a whole, felt that part-time jobs were valuable to them in light of making future decisions, particularly at this stage of their lives. The students noted that although they learned a lot from part-time jobs, the learning process was difficult because of the pressure of work.

Appendix 5: Employer reports

Note: The Adelaide and Sydney reports (except in one case in Sydney as indicated in the text) use real names. The other two reports—Plains and Treedera—use pseudonyms both for the towns and for the employers and their businesses.

Employer report, Adelaide

Erica Smith and Kelly Slee

Introduction

The Adelaide focus group consisted of 11 people, mainly employers but with three participants from organisations which delivered or co-ordinated training. All participants had direct experience with school students in workplaces, some only with vocational placements, some only with work experience, but the majority with both of these as well as part-time student workers. The participants were drawn from all over the city and from a variety of industry areas.

Name	Position	Organisation	Type of industry	Involvement with school students
Noelene Walsh	Traineeship co-ordinator	Coles Ltd	Supermarket	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Craig Ainslie	Field officer	Trainee and Apprentice Placement Centre	Group training centre	Vocational placements
Steve Holden	Residential manager	BAE Systems	Catering for airline industry	Work experience, vocational placements
Tracy Foulkes	Trainer/ Project work	Gowrie Training Centre	Training provider	Vocational placements
Nadia Mitolo	Human resources co-ordinator	Stamford Plaza	Hospitality	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Pam McEvoy	Training and development manager	Harris Scarfe	Department store	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Mike Rundell	Managing director	Brimblecombe Builders	Construction	Work experience, vocational placements
Angie Osborn	Payroll manager	Target	Variety store	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Marrilyn Price	Staff trainer	Woolworths Ltd	Supermarket	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
John Donjericovic	General manager	Millennium Systems	Information technology	Vocational placements
Barbara Smith	Industry co-ordinator	WAVES Inc.	VET-in-Schools regional association	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work

With such a large group, the discussion was confined to a relatively small number of points which were of interest to all participants. Thus, for example, there was little discussion of part-time paid work undertaken by school students because only a few of the employers were involved.

The extent and nature of school students' experiences in workplaces

It was clear that some employers devoted a lot of time and energy to organising their work-experience and vocational placement students, and took a great number of students. Nadia mentioned that she would like more vocational placement students to come for block periods because then she could fit in more work-experience students in the year. One employer said: 'Work placements give you satisfaction as you see the students developing and growing in confidence over the period of their placement'.

There was immense goodwill and tolerance towards young people. As the group training company participant said, 'It's all a part of growing up'.

Several participants said that they thought the VET-in-Schools programs, of which vocational placements were part, formed a useful feeder into their industries. One participant said that he also saw work experience as a feeder into VET-in-Schools programs. One employer raised a cautionary note that she thought not all employers meant the same thing when talking about work experience and vocational placements.

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences

In discussion about the training that was provided to school students, it became clear that, generally, the amount of training given varied with the following factors:

- the level of the young person's duties (for example, some employers placed work-experience students in limited duties,[45] and gave little training to them)
- the length of time the student was expected to be in the workplace (for example, part-time student workers received more training than work-experience students)
- the attitude of students (staff were willing to teach enthusiastic students more)
- specific industry factors (for example, construction industries had higher up-front training provision for safety reasons)

Apart from the formal training inputs, the amount which students learned varied greatly. It was generally agreed that students needed to be willing to learn; thus students who did not wish to undertake a vocational placement or work experience were less likely to learn from those experiences. The hospitality employer said: 'Sometimes placements are last minute; the school rings up desperate because they need to place people. These students may not be very motivated to learn'.

Vocational placement students were considered to be more eager to learn than work-experience students are. One employer felt this was because they had specifically chosen to study a particular industry area. The VET-in-Schools co-ordinator mentioned a 'pre-vocational' program that her organisation ran which provided a taster of the industry at the end of Year 10 for students contemplating a VET-in-Schools program. This would help ensure that students really wanted to train in that industry.

The employer from the IT industry said 'some (placement) students are like sponges. They soak up all the energy from our workers. They ask lots of questions. They learn from the Internet and are often better researchers than our full-time staff'.

The childcare sector participant said that role modelling was a common method of learning for students.

[45] The limited duties might be for one of a variety of reasons. The hospitality industry could not risk work-experience students in direct customer contact situations; in childcare the duty of care for children prohibited work-experience students having sole responsibility for children.

This employer felt that vocational placements were far more valuable for students and workers alike than work experience. Another employer commented that work-experience students can 'get lost in the system—the quieter ones might just float around'. One said that 'some work-experience students just think of work experience as a bit of a bludge week'. The general consensus was that the structure involved in vocational placements led to better learning. However, the view was also put that work experience performed a different function, allowing students to sample an industry area.

Factors that assisted learning included:

- the provision of learning outcomes or desired competencies by schools (for work experience and vocational placements)
- adequate preparation by schools for workplaces
- the presence of an intermediary third party who could provide a more 'cool', adult orientation to workplaces than could schools
- peer education by students or apprentices who had already been in workplaces
- off-the-job training before going into the workplace (at school or in a training organisation)

Barriers to learning included:

- intolerant workplace supervisors
- inadequate preparation of workplace supervisors for students
- lack of time available in workplaces to spend with students
- the tendency in South Australia to put work experience at the end of term so that there was no feedback or processing of the experience
- specific industry factors; for example, in hospitality the shift system made it hard for the human resources co-ordinator to ensure students were placed with sympathetic supervisors

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

While most employers were happy to take on students with learning or physical disabilities, sometimes the safety risks associated were too great. On placements or work experience, support workers might be made available by the school. Students from NESB backgrounds could find their poor English was a barrier to learning, but, on the other hand, some workplaces saw the possession of a second language as an advantage. One employer mentioned that her company's application forms contained a question asking about applicant's extra language skills. The construction industry employer stated that girls were not involved in placements in his industry, but this was not because they were not welcome, it was that they did not apply.

There was a general agreement that family involvement in an industry, or family role models, might affect school students' propensity to engage in either paid or unpaid work in that industry. Several employers had experience with indigenous school students. One employer thought that, like other cultural groups, indigenous students were attracted to employers who employed other people from their cultural background. Another said that such students could present cultural challenges for employers. For example, the nature of a family crisis that required time off might be different for an indigenous person and a non-indigenous person.

Conclusions

The following major features emerged from the Adelaide employers' report:

- the amount of training given by the employer varies with the nature of the workplace experience: paid student workers receive more training than vocational placement students, who receive more than work-experience students
- some employers find vocational placements more rewarding than work experience

- employers prefer their students to be well prepared for the workplace, perhaps by an intermediary
- some students are far more pro-active in their learning than others
- employers are aware that though they (managers and training staff) have goodwill towards students, the supervisors who work with the students might be less tolerant
- equity groups may present challenges in workplaces, but employers are prepared to try and overcome them

Employer report, Plains

Annette Green

Introduction

Interviews took place with two employers in Plains who were recommended by the CLO at the school. Plains is a small town in a relatively remote rural region in New South Wales where the main industries include agriculture—particularly cattle and more recently cotton. The employers had experience with both work-experience students from the school and in engaging part-time and full-time workers from the school community; however, neither had hosted a vocational placement student. No such employers were available for interview. The interview with the two employers was conducted in the back of Ben's supermarket and was characterised by interruptions and background noise.

Name	Position	Organisation	Type of industry	No. of staff	Involvement with school students
Ben	Manager and owner	Supermarket	Retail	8	Work experience, paid work
Bob	Manager and owner	Hardware store	Retail	5	Work experience, paid work

The extent and nature of school students' experiences in workplaces

The employers were clearly very closely involved in the Plains Central's work-experience program. They noted the school's policy of sending students outside the local area for work experience. They thought that there was too much emphasis on sending students to Sydney and beyond. They were overlooked in the process. Bob said:

> *The teachers ... tell the kids that their expectations are so good that they should be looking at going to Sydney or going to somewhere else ... go right to the top of the tree ... but somewhere along the way they need to get a job to help 'em get to the top of the tree, yet they're all looking for jobs in other places.*

Both employers recruited school students for paid work. When looking for students for work in paid positions, the two employers relied on local knowledge and observation. Ben said, 'I just take a look around town and of course we're lucky in a small town 'cause we know the kids and their parents and you can see the guys that've got a bit of potential'.

Both expressed great faith on observing potential workers in the shop and in the street:

> *You can tell by their dress—if they're well dressed you know you can pick 'em up and if they walk quick you know they're gonna work ... if you've got someone that just drags his foot and stops and looks around, you know he's not gonna work.* (Ben)

The employers also shared a belief that it was increasingly more difficult to have young people perform the basic tasks:

> *They want to be at the front desk and then, that's not good enough, they want 'em in the office on the computer. We had a young guy there for the last couple of weeks and he's just the same. This is what I want (them to) do on Saturday mornings ... come in, clean the bowsers, sweep the floor. The*

first day that was terrific and about halfway through the time, I could just see that it was going to fail 'cause it was—'Oh this was a bit too much'; he was a fit, healthy looking bloke but all he wanted to do was get inside and get behind the till. (Bob)

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences

The employers were willing to assist with vocational learning opportunities; one had put time and effort into a simulated retail environment, taking a cash register to the school one day a week. However, they were also very busy within their own work environments. As far as reporting back to the school after work experience, Ben said:

We have a form that we fill out at ... daily. Did they arrive to work on time, how was their appearance, how was their attitude? ... And then at the finish you put down a little comment on what you thought—how they worked for that week or two weeks ... whatever, they were with you ... and then you just hand it back to the school.

With training students on work experience, the employers felt the time was a critical factor, as it was difficult to spend time showing students what to do:

As you can appreciate the work force is completely different to the school environment and they have to learn very quick. (Bob)

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

The employers had not experienced vocational placements in a formal sense, but both employers had become involved with a student with special needs who had been given work-placement time as a form of motivation and alternative to the school program. They took great pride in caring for this student and offering social skills, as they felt he was disadvantaged both intellectually and because of his difficult home environment:

Well, when he comes to work, if he comes to work in the State that he usually comes to work, I send him home and I know Bob's sent him home to go home and have a shower, have a shave put your clothes back on and come back 'cause he comes like no one would have him. Give him a job to do—yes I can do it. You need to show him exactly everything to move or he won't do it but he's slowly learning. I've gradually now got him to have a shower every morning, have a shave every morning ... his parents won't help him. (Ben)

Effects of workplace experiences on subsequent employment and access to higher education

Both employers had employed young people for both part-time and full-time work. However, the possibility of employing young people following work experience was limited by the school's policy of encouraging most students to do their work experience outside the local area. They were more likely to employ full-time young people who had started with them as part-time student workers. They found that the best employees in their working environment were:

Mediocre kids that just have basic education and they haven't been the top of the class ... sometimes those kids make the best workers. They're fantastically enthusiastic and everything but I haven't had anyone that I've kept on from work experience. I've got one girl that started when she was 16 and she just came in after school and said have you got any work, and she's still with me now and she's just turned 21 ... terrific ... never took a backwards step from the day she got there. (Bob)

The employers also emphasised communication skills as top priority when selecting potential workers, and a problem in work-experience situations:

You can see the guys that've got a bit of potential—just the fact that they can come into the shop and they can speak to people and there are very, very few of them about. It's one of the biggest downfalls we've got is that kids can't communicate any more. We've got the greatest communication system in the world ... and people can't talk to each other any more and that's the downfall that we've got with kids today. (Ben)

Conclusion

The following features emerged from the Plains employers' report:

- both of these employers have a genuine interest in assisting in the development of young people and see this as a community contribution
- employers would like students to be better prepared for workplaces, particularly in terms of communication skills
- the process of selecting work-experience places needs to be discussed with the local employers so they do not feel under valued
- paid work may often involve the repetition of low-skilled tasks rather than providing exciting learning opportunities continually (these employers were concerned that students were often unwilling to engage in such tasks)

Employer report, Sydney

Erica Smith

Introduction

Five employers in the inner south/south-west of Sydney were interviewed; the employers were recommended by the local Compact (school-to-work programs) co-ordinator. The area was highly multicultural with a range of industries, and low- to medium-socioeconomic status. It was not possible to gather employers together for a focus group, so four were interviewed in their workplaces and one by telephone. One organisation preferred to be referred to by a pseudonym (denoted with an asterisk).

Both work experience and vocational placements were highly resource-intensive for the organisations. Rebecca at the Illawarra Catholic Club, for example, appeared to spend a substantial part of her time negotiating with schools and arranging training for students. Involvement of employers in programs appeared to be for, variously, philanthropic, public relations or recruitment purposes. Canterbury Hospital, in particular, viewed its programs as a way of giving back to the local community, which raised a lot of finance for the hospital.

The extent and nature of school students' experiences in workplaces

Most of the employers took six to ten students each year, or even more.[47] They had well-developed programs for work experience and vocational placements. Canterbury Hospital, for example, had not taken any students until they developed proper personnel procedures. Some also offered placements to TAFE students as well. Two employers noted that they preferred formal arrangements with schools through the Compact co-ordinators; they did not like students to approach them direct, as the students did not know how to speak to employers. Despite the existence of such formal links, the employers noted that they did not get formal feedback from Compact or the schools on how they had performed as host employers.

Although two organisations also employed school students, they did not appear to have regarded the employment of student workers as in any way linked to their other programs with school students. Checkout Ltd regarded their student workers as just a part of their regular workforce. Sydney Turf Club employed a large number of casual staff for race days, of which there were 60 per year. As at the Illawarra Catholic Club, school students at the Turf Club were not allowed to work in areas serving alcoholic drinks but were employed in other functions. The other workplaces did not offer part-time work to school students because of requirements for maturity in their workforces.

[47] This was partly to be expected, as they had been recommended to the researcher by the local Compact co-ordinator.

Name	Position	Organisation	Type of industry	No. of employees	Involvement with school students
Lorraine Farlow	Training and devt manager	Quality Food Services	Catering for hospitals	300	Work experience, vocational placements
Rebecca McFarlane	Personnel manager	Illawarra Catholic Club	Hospitality	230 (120 on-site)	Work experience, vocational placements
Marie Dickinson	Director of corporate services	Canterbury Hospital	Health	600 FTE	Work experience, vocational placements
Wendy Wardle*	Store services manager	Checkout Ltd*	Food retailing		Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Kimberley Dixon and Nikki Williams	Employee relations co-ordinator and office manager	Sydney Turf Club	Racing	620, including 500 casuals	Work experience, paid work

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences

Various forms of up-front training were given to school students. At Quality Foods, there was a one-hour induction program for both work experience and vocational placement students. At Canterbury Hospital, the students received exactly the same induction as paid employees. At Checkout Ltd, the work experience and vocational placement students had a shorter induction than paid staff. Paid workers' programs there included a more extensive induction plus a program of skills training. All of the workplaces had a 'buddy' or mentor system in place. At Canterbury Hospital, the students had a 'buddy' and also another contact person so that if the buddy arrangement went sour, there was someone else for the student to work with. Most of the employers recognised the need for structured programs so that both student and mentor felt satisfied. As Marie put it, 'I didn't want the people that they were being buddied with to feel "I have got this chain around my neck" ... it needed to be worthwhile for everybody'.

Kimberley at Sydney Turf Club had arranged for students to visit a different site to gain wider experience; Rebecca at Illawarra Catholic Club made sure that work-experience students did not do mundane work like clearing tables: 'We want them to be interested to get into the industry'. She also wanted to ensure that the students gained some underlying knowledge as well as skills.

For vocational placement students, formal assessment by a qualified assessor took place against a logbook of competencies. For work-experience students, an evaluation form about the students was completed. These arrangements were similar in all the workplaces, although Canterbury Hospital also asked the students to evaluate the hospital's performance in the work-experience program. She said 'They are astounded that they actually have had that responsibility'. Employers found that different schools had different requirements, and they had higher respect for schools with more stringent requirements. Only Checkout Ltd had formal assessment systems for its paid student workers. This system was linked with the company appraisal procedures.

Lorraine at Quality Foods thought that work-experience students gained maturity from mixing with adults and taking on responsibility. In addition, 'we educate the students about our role'. The vocational placement students, in particular, had the opportunity to use different equipment from that available at school. Work experience helped the students make career choices. Employers tried to give the student authentic work rather than just 'people's left-over tasks'. At Canterbury Hospital, one work-experience student was working in reception, and, because the receptionist was sick, she managed the reception area for the last two days of her week: 'She felt so proud of herself; she came in and asked lots of questions but that's perfectly OK'.

Some employers offered comments on how the students created their own learning. Marie at Canterbury Hospital said: 'They watch us like you wouldn't believe. Their eyes are very lively'.

Kimberley at Sydney Turf Club said that the students, particularly the student workers, used modelling extensively. The organisation therefore had to be careful to put the students with staff whose behaviour was appropriate.

Some employers identified some barriers to learning. Canterbury Hospital and Sydney Turf Club both mentioned that some areas of the organisation were not conducive to work experience and vocational placements because of the attitude of the workers in those areas. Marie acknowledged that even the most helpful of staff:

> *... can be fairly awe-inspiring sometimes. None of us have a great amount of power, but, depending upon the day, we could be storming around here like a bear with its foot chopped off, and no-one will touch us, even our own staff will leave us alone. If they happen to hit on one of those days, if they have never seen it happen before it can be quite frightening.*

The limited nature of the work that could be offered to students was a further barrier. At Canterbury Hospital the vocational placement students had to attend at weekends because of timetabling difficulties, so they could not do a full range of office duties.

The students themselves posed some barriers to learning. Some were timid and did not ask enough questions to learn to the maximum. Having more than one student at a time, particularly from opposite sexes, could be a barrier to learning. A few employers noted that some students did not really seem very interested in learning anything. One said:

> *I think a majority of them [work experience placements where students are uninterested] are teachers fobbing them off to a willing organisation, whether there is an interest there or not ... I very much have the view that ordinarily the work-experience program is an administrative thing rather than an actual learning experience.*

She noted that some schools used to book in, say, 15 students for the year, and, thus, she knew that they were not really trying to match individual students with workplaces where they wanted to be. Her departmental managers would refuse to have work-experience students again after a few bad experiences. However, this employer noted that she would 'hate to see work experience scrapped'; it just needed to be better implemented by schools.

Employers felt that students' learning was facilitated if they had been well prepared by the school. Such preparation could include:

- involvement of a third party such as a Compact co-ordinator to provide the link between school and workplace
- preparing students for the crises that might arise in workplaces
- a comprehensive list of specific competencies to be developed in the workplace
- students being clear about why they are in the workplace
- helping employers to see the student's viewpoint
- giving students pre-requisite skills; for example, computer skills if they are to do office work experience

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

Three of the employers took 'special needs kids' on work experience. Regular groups of these students with disabilities were accommodated at Quality Foods, and some showed initiative and were able to take on more complex work. Many NESB students were also accommodated; the only problem noted with NESB students was that they might be a little shy at first. However, as Wendy from Checkout Ltd noted: 'I am sure we can teach them (English) on the spot; this is where you learn. You have to learn in the classroom and you can learn outside as well'.

Occasionally there might be difficulties where parents were strict with such children—'their fathers watch over them'—or where their traditional dress was not consistent with safety regulations.

Employers all mentioned the multicultural nature of the area and said that they never discriminated in their employment practices, either for paid work or for work experience and vocational placements. In fact, coming from an NESB was often regarded favourably because the employee could speak to customers or clients from that background in their own language. Sydney Turf Club, however, noted that few NESB students applied for work experience or part-time work there. They attributed this to the fact that it was an industry where family traditions of employment were important and the club was still fairly Anglo-Saxon in nature. In a similar vein, Canterbury Hospital noted that applicants for vocational placements and work experience were nearly all female because of the health industry's female nature, except in a limited number of occupations. One employer felt that parents were often involved in seeking work experience, and, therefore, this tended to keep students within traditional ethnic or gender lines.

Effects of workplace experiences on subsequent employment and access to higher education

Most of the workplaces did not recruit a large number of entry-level workers; however, employers said they would certainly regard completion of work experience or vocational placements in their own organisation favourably should the students apply for jobs when they left school. At Checkout Ltd, many work-experience students went on to part-time work, and a few onto full-time work later on. Wendy said that this was their preferred hiring pattern because then their staff are already partly trained. She said the local students knew about this: 'I had a boy ring up yesterday and he said, "If I do work experience, how do I go about getting a job afterward?"'

More generally, employers said they would rather 'have someone who has had some experience of a workplace in some shape or form'. Nearly all employees mentioned part-time work at McDonalds in this context. They felt that McDonalds instilled work habits and a willingness to accept discipline. Sydney Turf Club felt that paid work was more beneficial than work experience in gaining employment later on. Kimberley noted that their casual staff seemed to move into full-time employment very easily once they had finished school or TAFE. Kimberley said that she would 'almost totally disregard' work experience on someone's résumé, mainly because of her unfavourable experiences with work-experience students herself. From paid work, students may have learned useful skills and also general work habits; both were advantageous. Wendy at Checkout Ltd said that she asked school leavers if they had enjoyed work experience. As she put it, 'you have to work for a long time so we like to know that they like working'.

Conclusion

The following features emerged from the Sydney employers' report:

- most employers have a genuine interest in assisting in the development of young people
- while work experience and vocational placements are seen as learning experiences, paid work is not
- employers either have, or see the need for, structured programs for dealing with work-experience students
- employers tend to prefer an intermediary between themselves and schools
- employers would like students to be better prepared for workplaces
- some employers have had bad experiences with uninterested work-experience students
- ethnicity is not a barrier to access to workplace experiences in a multicultural area, nor does it pose much of a barrier to learning
- a history of paid work is viewed more favourably than work experience or vocational placements in applicants for full-time work

Employer report, Treedera

Annette Green

Introduction

Three employers in Treedera, a small town in rural New South Wales, were interviewed. The careers teacher at the school recommended the employers. This teacher was responsible for organising most vocational placements and work experience for the school. These employers had experience with work-experience students from the school, in vocational placements and in engaging both part-time and full-time workers from the school community. All were interviewed by telephone because of time pressures and the difficulty of being away from small businesses.

The extent and nature of school students' experiences in workplaces

All three employers were enthusiastic about their involvement in vocational experiences for school students. They saw both work experience and structured work placements as opportunities to offer insight into the realities and nature of paid employment, and put effort into both types of experience. The school arranged all placements, and the employers commented on the excellent liaison offered by both the careers teacher and the VET co-ordinator at the school. Peter had been involved for many years in two sites, and he said: 'It is vital to give kids opportunities to work in a workplace, to really learn what work is, to give them confidence to approach employers'.

All three reported that preparation by the school ensured that the students were well prepared and well presented with appropriate documentation. They had all employed students who had been in their work places for either work experience, TRAC or structured work placements. They were enthusiastic members of the VET group in the district. It would have been interesting to interview some other employers who were not selected by the school to provide other views.

Name	Position	Type of industry	No. of employees	Involvement with school students
Laura	Manager and owner	Dress shop	3	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Dennis	Manager and owner	Department store	9 staff, including 3 casuals	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work
Peter	Manager	Electrical appliance store	5	Work experience, vocational placements, paid work

The nature and relative importance of learning gained from these experiences

The employers all spoke about preparing special programs for students who were coming to the workplace. In the case of work experience, these programs needed to be structured within the short timeframe so as to maximise the learning opportunities. The influence and time commitment of the school had evidently made a big difference to the work-experience program, as the careers teacher provided very clear documentation as well as visiting workplaces frequently during the experience. In vocational placements, both the TAFE teacher[50] and the school-based VET co-ordinator liaised frequently with the employers, and

[50] VET students at Treedera High School do their off-the-job training at the local TAFE college.

expectations and outcomes were made very explicit and discussed with the employer group. In each workplace, one employee was delegated to look after the student during their time at work, although all three managers became very involved in the process as well. Peter started all students on workplace awareness activities, which included OH&S aspects of the workplace. He then familiarised them with the basics of the computer system in his store. Both Peter and Laura expected students to become familiar with all aspects of financial transactions in the workplace, including operating the cash register, placing and receiving orders and even financial contacts and lay-by arrangements.

Dennis commented that the interest and motivation shown by the student in each case governed the amount of training given to each individual student: 'Training tends to be consistent with their attitude and the progress they are making'.

He pointed out that a critical indicator for him was the 'end of task' behaviour; for example, does the student continue with a generic or other task as outlined, or just wait for further instruction. The induction training he offered at the start of each placement included an explanation of 'other tasks' when not specifically directed to a particular job. Peter also pointed out that he would not waste a lot of time on the reasonably unusual case of a student who had a negative attitude or was clearly not listening to what was being taught.

Laura emphasised that she offered the same training for all students: 'We teach them to do everything: window dressing, counter, till, budget accounts, lay-by and banking'.

She enjoyed the process she described as seeing them mature, and she said that this was demonstrated even through the way students answered the telephone by the time they had completed their time with her. She commented on the development of confidence in many students. She had been involved in various workplace learning opportunities for school students for ten years and had not had any negative experiences. She believed students were well selected, happy to learn and felt 'part of the family' by the time they left.

Dennis saw the different arrangements as different in terms of learning. With work experience, there was a need to make the experience enjoyable and varied, with less emphasis on learning specific tasks. With vocational placement students, Dennis saw the need to fulfil as many of the competency requirements as he could. Part-time workers needed to provide 'value for money', and the emphasis was on getting tasks performed: 'They are here to do work, not necessarily to learn'.

All three commented on assessment, but there seemed to be a lack of clarity about what was involved, particularly in terms of the vocational placement requirements. All three provided quite detailed reports to the school and, in most cases, these were also shared with the student. Although daily records were kept during the placement, most of the assessment seemed to come at the end in terms of overall evaluation and 'tick box' reports. All three believed assessment was an area that needs further exploration. Dennis discussed students who may have problems adjusting to work placements:

> *I don't believe an employer is going to gain much by saying something negative. The student is usually aware of any problems, and may be lacking in confidence or have low self-esteem. I hope the teacher will address this when I report back.*

Access of equity groups to workplace experiences and learning

The employers felt they gave all students a chance and had not particularly considered 'equity groups' *per se*, so this aspect was not extensively discussed. Laura had recently had experience with a 'special needs' student and reported that this had gone very well. She had just received a rather poorly spelt but quite moving card from this student expressing the feeling that she had learned a lot while she was working at the shop.

Dennis had worked with an Aboriginal student who had now great ambition to go into specialised sports retail. He had been very enthusiastic about the change of attitude and motivation in this student, who had also been mentioned at the school as a student who had been very much changed by his work placement experiences.

Effects of workplace experiences on subsequent employment and access to higher education

Peter believed that once students had successfully participated in vocational programs, they were far more likely to impress future employers. They had assembled a strong résumé, had experience in the workplace, and comments from employers rather than just school results. Dennis commented that he had selected most of his part-time, casual and busy-period staff from students who had completed work experience and/or vocational placements at his store, as they were 'identified as good workers and trained'.

All three employers had employed casual staff from vocational programs. Laura was influenced by references gained by school students doing vocational placements, as she could check out their attitudes and motivation from other employers in the town. She had taken on a full-time staff member after a favourable work experience, and she had worked for her for six years. This person had recently left to get married, but she described her as a model employee.

Peter cited two students who had completed vocational placements at his business, then gone on to do very well in industry straight from school. Further training was included in these careers, and he linked them very directly with the confidence they had gained during vocational placements.

Conclusion

Some factors contributing to the success of these programs include:

- extensive school-to-work liaison arrangements
- the sense of ownership and participation showed by the three employers interviewed
- the enthusiasm of these employers
- the well-documented nature of these experiences—both in student preparation and presentation and in reporting back and assessing students
- the extensive history the school had in organising and arranging vocational placements and work experience for students
- the business community involvement in the various VET programs, including work experience, TRAC and VET-in-Schools

Peter provided the final word, which sums up the attitude of these employers:

> *When I first started work, I had a patient boss who took a lot of time to settle me in. Taking the time and treating these kids as employees means getting in there and getting their confidence so they become more work ready.*

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research is Australia's primary research and development organisation in the field of vocational education and training.

NCVER undertakes and manages research programs and monitors the performance of Australia's training system.

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ISBN 1 74096 004 1 print edition
ISBN 1 74096 005 X web edition